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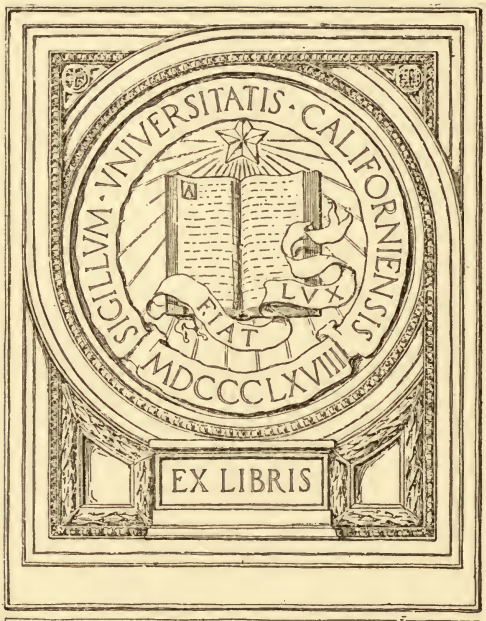
American Dramatists Series

The Flower Shop

Marion Craig-Wentworth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THE FLOWER SHOP

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A Play in Three Acts

BY

MARION CRAIG-WENTWORTH

BOSTON
RICHARD G. BADGER
THE GORHAM PRESS
1912

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

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THE FLOWER SHOP

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CHARACTERS

MARGARET KENDALL, *owner of "The Flower Shop," known as "Margaret Bell"*
WILLIAM RAMSEY, *a business man*
LOUISE RAMSEY, *his wife*
STEPHEN HARTWELL, *an attorney*
JOSEPH TEN EYCK, *a theatrical manager*
HELPERS IN THE FLOWER SHOP, *Dave, Polly, Lena, Mary*
CUSTOMERS OF THE FLOWER SHOP
Charles Dunn
Cornelia von Schlegel, affianced to Charles Dunn
Mrs. Summers
Mrs. Knight
FOLLOWERS OF MARGARET, *a group of women.*

Time: The present.
Scene: The Flower Shop.
The action occupies the afternoon and evening of one day.

The Flower Shop

ACT I

Scene: A white spacious room of a flower shop in an inland American city. It is filled with a profusion of growing green things; bay trees, ferns, box, high over-arching palms massed in groups; ivy plants, asparagus, and delicate, feathery sprays of green hanging from the walls and ceiling, with here and there a plaster cast of a Greek god looking through the leaves; gay blossoming shrubs and bushes banked in tiers on the floor,— azaleas, white lilacs, Easter lilies, red and pink rambler roses. Great jars of cut flowers stand on the long worktable against the wall at the right.

Large doors at the back, guarded by stone Japanese temple posts, lead into the salesroom, where may be seen a bit of the counter, the street door and the show window, another tangle of plants and flowers. A carved stone bench brought from some old Italian garden is in the center of the stage under a tall palm, and another, quite similar, stands near the massive table on the left — a few chairs of quaint design

are conveniently placed. Side doors to left and right, one leading to the street, the other to a conservatory. A window in the wall to the left at the back.

Time: early afternoon.

Discovered: LENA, POLLY, *and* MARY *working at floral decorations.* LENA, *a tall, thin, worn-looking girl, is making a wreath, while the other two are filling in a wedding bell.* MARY *is slight and pale, with a delicate beauty of her own.* POLLY *is plump and pretty, with a merry, care-free, childish face. She carries on an innocent flirtation with* DAVE, *a stalwart, curly-headed young man who is passing in and out of the conservatory with plants.*

POLLY. [*Humming a bit from the Lohengrin wedding march*] Oh, dear! I'd like to be the bride!

MARY. [*Smiling at her*] Not really, Polly?

POLLY. Yes, I would! and get *married*, instead of having to work for a living.

LENA. Don't let Miss Margaret hear you talk like that.

POLLY. Why not?

LENA. She'd think you were foolish.

POLLY. Foolish to want to be married? Why, every girl wants *that.*

LENA. Not Miss Margaret. She doesn't believe in getting married.

POLLY. I don't care what she *believes;* she'd like to be in love just as much as I would. Isn't she a woman?

[*They laugh at her.*]

LENA. I wonder what she would do if she *were* in love; what would become of her ideas.

POLLY. I can tell you. They'd all go ke—smash! [*Gesture.*]

LENA. Or if she got tired — good and tired.

MARY. Would you marry a man simply because you were tired of working, Lena?

LENA *stares at* MARY *as she moves to the table for more flowers with evident intent to cut her.*

POLLY. Would you, Lena?

LENA. [*Sharply*] Certainly, if he was a good man.

POLLY. You don't care about being in *love?* Why, *I* think *that* is the whole thing!

LENA. That's because you are so hopelessly young, Polly. What would it matter, if he gave me a good home?

MARY. [*Still hurt by* LENA'S *stare*] Then you are no better than I am, Lena Shrieves, though

you will not speak to me. I was more than tired when Miss Margaret saved me from the life I was being dragged into. I was hungry — hungry — do you understand? You don't know what it means to live on three or four dollars a week in a miserable little room for five years, and never know what it is to have your body warm in winter or your hunger satisfied.

LENA. [*With virtuous sharpness*] I'd keep *respectable!*

MARY. [*Passionately*] You wouldn't! You couldn't! You'd get more tired than you are now; you'd get so sick of it all and so desperate you'd take the first offer you had for just one square meal and some warm underwear to stop the shivers!

[*There is the noise of some one entering*]

POLLY. Here she is, girls.

Enter MARGARET, *a beautiful woman, of tall, noble build, gracious and winning of manner. She is followed by* JOSEPH TEN EYCK. *The girls quietly withdraw.*

MARGARET. It is quite as I say, Ten Eyck.

TEN EYCK. Then it is useless to speak of it further.

MARGARET. Yes. My voice is entirely gone. I faced the fact that I should never sing again some time ago.

TEN EYCK. [*Sympathetically*] Too bad — too bad! By the way, what has become of Louise? How you did sing — both of you that last night!

MARGARET. Yes, we were in high spirits. We never dreamed of the swift, terrible illness so soon to shut out the light and leave the two song birds in the dark. I don't know where she is. Doubtless it has been with her as with me. She has probably never recovered her voice, although at the time the doctors said there was more hope for her than for me. They thought a long rest might do it.

TEN EYCK. I suppose she is married?

MARGARET. Very likely.

TEN EYCK. And you? How does it happen you have never married, Margaret — you, of all women? I should have expected ——

MARGARET [*Lightly*] Oh no!

TEN EYCK. You had any number of admirers to choose from. I don't like to see you doing *this* — it goes against the grain somehow — a woman like you! You needn't, you know.

MARGARET [*Smiling*] I am quite able to take care of myself.

TEN EYCK. Oh, I know — but *Margaret Kendall* in the commercial world — running a business — no, no! the thing is preposterous. You really ought to marry and have a husband.

MARGARET [*Laughing*] That is amusing, coming from you, Ten Eyck. How you used to rail against husbands. Didn't you always say they were a bother?

TEN EYCK. For a star, yes; or a woman with a career — you can't expect a man to marry his wife's career. An artist hasn't any business to have a husband.

MARGARET. There you go!

TEN EYCK. But it is different with you now, Margaret — in your present circumstances. I remember I did make rather a fuss about your marrying William Ramsey — I was afraid you would take him, and if you had it would have been all up with you as a singer. He had his ideas on the subject.

MARGARET. Yes, that is what made the trouble between us.

TEN EYCK. Still, if you had taken him you wouldn't have been in this state ——

MARGARET [*Amused*] What state?

TEN EYCK. Working for your living, like any ordinary woman.

MARGARET. [*With amused reminiscence*] I wouldn't have married William Ramsey for the world — not after I found him out. A splendid man — oh, yes — but it came to be "when Greek meets Greek" with us. We never met

without the flash and smoke of battle. So we ended it. It was a lucky thing the fatal words were not spoken over William Ramsey and me, or — *something* would certainly have happened. As for working for my living, I am very proud of that, you know. It is a beautiful work, too. I love the flowers. Best of all, I am free. So don't worry about me, Ten Eyck, and my not having a husband. [*Lightly*] What should I want of one?

TEN EYCK. It's not reasonable, Margaret. I can't believe that a woman like you must go through life without some one to love her and look out for her. [*Looking at her keenly.*]

MARGARET. [*Trying to hide a pain in her voice*] Not now — not for me — neither love nor music.

TEN EYCK. [*Sympathetically*] Well, that's your secret. Anyway, you are a brave girl, Margaret. [*Shaking hands*] I must go. I must find some one to take the place of our star. She can't hold out. You won't let me hear — let me judge of your voice?

MARGARET. [*Shaking her head sadly*] I can't sing a note.

TEN EYCK. Come and see us to-night. I will leave seats for you. Good-bye. [*Turns*] I can't help thinking, though, you would be happier with a husband. Yes, even William Ramsey would be better than none at all!

[*He goes out to* MARGARET'S *laughing protest. She turns to arrange some flowers,*]

POLLY. [*Announcing*] A gentleman to see you, Miss Margaret. A stranger. Mr. Ramsey.

Enter WILLIAM RAMSEY, *a man of bold but attractive strength, rather heavily built, with high Saxon coloring and a blue choleric eye. Magnetic, conscious of his power, but not disagreeably so.*

MARGARET. [*Astonished, lets fall to the table the flowers in her hands and turns to face him*] William! You!

RAMSEY. Well, haven't you a word for me after all these years?

MARGARET. Why, yes — you surprised me — won't you sit down? I spoke your name but a moment ago.

RAMSEY. Ah, I am pleased I am not forgotten.

MARGARET. How did you find me out?

RAMSEY. We are on our way to New York. My wife told me you were here — under an assumed name — so I couldn't resist coming to see you. I hope you don't mind.

MARGARET. Your wife, you say. Then you are married.

RAMSEY. Yes.

MARGARET. [*With gentle amusement*] She is sufficiently *docile*, I suppose.

RAMSEY. [*Bristling*] She is my ideal of a wife.

MARGARET. Perfectly *domestic* and of *course* no yearnings for a public career.

RAMSEY. I should quickly nip them in the bud if she had. Thank goodness, I have nothing of *that* kind to disturb my happiness. She is a true woman.

MARGARET. Not a singer, I assume.

RAMSEY. No, indeed. That is, not now. She was once.

MARGARET. Ah! You made her give up her voice for you?

RAMSEY. No, I met her after she had lost it. By the way, she says you were in the same epidemic — you must have sung together.

MARGARET. Not Louise Van Anden?

RAMSEY. Yes.

MARGARET. Really! [*Pauses*] Then her voice never came back.

RAMSEY. No. She has said nothing about it for some time, so I think she has quite forgotten.

MARGARET. Forgotten! Where is she? Isn't she coming to see me?

RAMSEY. Yes, later. I slipped away, for I wanted to see you alone. I wanted to see how you were getting on — if you had changed since the old days — what you were doing and thinking.

MARGARET. So you married Louise, my old singing mate! Well, well! I suppose if she had kept her voice it would have meant no more to you than mine did.

RAMSEY. Your voice meant everything to me, Margaret. It was you. It was the magic that first drew me to you.

MARGARET. Yet you would have murdered it.

RAMSEY. How do you mean?

MARGARET. You demanded I give it up on the day of our marriage.

RAMSEY. Of course. You know how strongly I felt on that point. I didn't want you to appear in public — to make the treasure common. How would it have looked? You could have gone on *singing.*

MARGARET. For you, alone? In the chimney corner? With *my voice?*

RAMSEY. For friends, for charity,— in a private way. That seems far more beautiful to me. If you had loved me you would have done it.

MARGARET. [*Shakes her head*] If you had loved *me* you would have been glad and proud ——

RAMSEY. To have you sing in public? As a professional star? Never, not as my wife. Of course, if you hadn't insisted on marriage we might have had our love in secret,— you could have kept on in your career; but you *would* have

marriage, so very naturally I demanded you retire from the public gaze.

MARGARET. And then the battle was on! A royal one, too,— wasn't it, William?

RAMSEY. Yes, I admit we were pretty evenly matched.

MARGARET. You didn't conquer me.

RAMSEY. No, nor you me.

MARGARET. Yet that struggle was the lesson of my life.

RAMSEY. What do you mean?

MARGARET. I wanted to be both the artist and the wife.

RAMSEY. Well, you saw that was impossible — I taught you that.

MARGARET. You taught me the value of freedom.

RAMSEY. [*Irritably*] What do you mean? — freedom!

MARGARET. To be one's self — to grow each in his own way, the woman as well as the man. If marriage can't do that ——

RAMSEY. Well?

MARGARET. Remain alone. For me, there can be no real or lasting happiness without freedom — of that I am sure.

RAMSEY. [*Looks about the flower shop contemptuously*] Is this what you call freedom? or

happiness? Humph! If you had married me you might not have been happy, but at least you would not have come to this — to be forced to support yourself and battle with the business world. I could have protected you from that.

MARGARET. I think better of marriage than that it is merely an escape from the responsibility of taking care of one's self. I want to earn my own way in the world. I mean always to do it, whether I marry or not. [*Leaning across the table and speaking in a low, earnest voice*] My flower shop takes the place of my voice. I couldn't begin to tell you all that it means to me. Years ago you roused the rebel in me. It was for myself alone. Now I am a rebel for other women too. If I failed with my voice I shall not fail with my flower shop.

RAMSEY. What do you mean?

MARGARET. It is the symbol of a new freedom for woman.

RAMSEY. You don't mean *votes* — you haven't gone off on that craze?

MARGARET. A greater freedom than that,— economic freedom.

POLLY. [*Announcing*] There are some customers here, Miss Margaret.

MARGARET. I will see them.

RAMSEY. Must I go?

MARGARET. [*Indicating a stone bench screened by plants*] No, sit here. You said you wanted to know what I am thinking and doing — you shall see. It is one of my women, doubtless. [*Confidentially*] Since I have been in this work I have been allowed to look intimately into the lives of scores of women. Sometimes I think my flower shop is a temple — this room a confessional, and I the priestess — so many hearts have been opened to me here. They seem like a lot of frightened slaves — the women — and the husbands masters and owners by right of the household purse,— if only that could be abolished!

Enter airily MRS. SUMMERS, *a pretty, fashionable little woman.*

MARGARET. [*Advancing to her*] Ah, Mrs. Summers.

MRS. SUMMERS. Oh, Miss Bell, I am in a bit of a hurry — may I speak with you a moment? I have a piece of good news. I may get my conservatory after all! [*Speaks in a low voice*] I am working hard — I have him almost twisted round my finger — one more little twist — then the check — victory — my conservatory at last!

MARGARET. How have you managed him?

MRS. SUMMERS. [*With gay irresponsibility*] I waited each time before speaking until he was

pleased and good natured over something — sometimes it was a special dinner — then I would sit on the arm of his chair, and pet him a little, and casually drop a hint or two to get him used to the idea, you know, until now he is quite interested — really. Oh, one more dinner will do it I am sure — [*with a quick change, loyally*] oh, you mustn't think Mr. Summers isn't perfectly *generous*, he is — he's a love — but of course I have to be careful and not ask at the wrong time — that would never do — when he's in an ill humor or when his dyspepsia's bad.

MARGARET. Do you have to wait long?

MRS. SUMMERS. [*Lightly*] Oh, sometimes it has been a whole week, and I have been so embarrassed — oh frightfully — but he always makes up for it, he is really so generous. Of course he does scold me once in a while — says he slaves for his money. So he does, poor dear — he is getting awfully bald — he calls me frivolous — says I spend in a day what it takes him weeks to earn. Still, what can I do, with our position to maintain?

MARGARET. You see, if you earned your own money, Mrs. Summers, and struggled and worried as your husband has to, you would realize his point of view. You should work for your living as I do.

MRS. SUMMERS. [*Shocked*] But I am married!

MARGARET. That makes no difference — you are a human being. He couldn't call you frivolous then, nor scold — nor have to be wheedled.

MRS. SUMMERS. Oh, well — *he likes it.* Besides, I don't know what being married would be like without our little scenes. It is really great fun to see how much of a manager one can be. Next time I come I shall surely order the conservatory. Good-bye. Oh, you take things too seriously, Miss Margaret. The men like us all the better for it. Don't you know that? Really! [*Exit.*]

RAMSEY. [*Who has been observing though pretending to read a magazine*] Hasn't that woman freedom?

MARGARET. License — not freedom. She is one of the dependent spendthrifts. Honest work, that is what she needs. Why, there isn't a married woman with any *pride* or *self-respect* who doesn't envy me the independence of my flower shop — not one who doesn't long to have a work and income of her own — not one who doesn't feel the humiliation of having to ask the man she loves for money, no matter how generous he may be. If he has a hard struggle himself it is all the more painful for her.

RAMSEY. [*Emphatically*] It ought not to be.

MARGARET. But it is!

RAMSEY. [*Positively*] The woman ought to be supported by the man. It is a law of nature. Do you mean to say you would not give up this flower shop for the man you love — if he asked it?

MARGARET. [*Shaking her head*] I couldn't be dependent upon any one — least of all the man I might love.

RAMSEY. Absurd!

MARGARET. It is bad for a man, why not a woman?

RAMSEY. Nonsense! Ridiculous!

MARGARET. [*Serenely*] I shall always be my own mistress because I have my own work, my own pocket-book. I can come and go as I like — play or sing (if I had the voice) in public without asking leave of my lord or running the risk of offending his masculine pride. I am an individual. I am free. I have my flower shop. So I say to the women who sometimes weep on my shoulder, "Follow my example. Go get one of your own."

RAMSEY. You have followers then?

MARGARET. Yes,— thirty. [*With sudden eager impetuosity*] Don't you see, William? It isn't only because I want women to be free. I want them to grow, to be larger, nobler, more beautiful — I want them to care for other children as well as their own — for the common life, for

justice, for big ideas. That is it, William. I want them to *care*, and they can't until they take part in the life outside their four walls. They've been amateurs so long ——

POLLY. [*Announcing*] Mrs. Knight, Miss Margaret.

Enter MRS. KNIGHT, *a crushed and frightened looking woman, who would like to be "perky" but doesn't quite dare. She is dressed in deep mourning.*

MARGARET. Ah, Mrs. Knight,— what can I do for you?

MRS. KNIGHT. I have come to pay my bills, Miss Bell. The funeral was lovely. Mr. Knight would have been pleased if he could have sat up in his coffin and seen all those flowers! [*With a large satisfied sigh*] My, what a fine showing they made! ahem! I mean he would have been pleased if he hadn't known *what they cost.* [*Stage whisper*] My, what a scolding I've escaped. You see, poor old Hezekiah — he couldn't bear to spend his money; that is, I mean he couldn't bear to have *me* spend it, though he was a good provider — specially a good *table* provider. I must say that for him. He was fond of good eating, Hezekiah was, and he had plenty of money. There, my dear — [*she counts out some bills and fingers them lovingly*] I hate to give them up. It feels so good to handle

a little money after all these years. You don't know what that means, Miss Bell. I have often envied you. You can spend your own money.

MARGARET. And earn it, too,— which is better still, Mrs. Knight.

MRS. KNIGHT. But think of me, my dear. Hezekiah never let me spend a cent myself — why, it seemed as if he couldn't bear to — even five cents for a spool of thread. He always wanted to put it down on the counter himself. It was so mortifying sometimes, Miss Bell. [*Sheds a few tears*] Why, I've been no better than a slave. [*Awed warning*] Don't ever marry, Miss Bell. Don't ever give up your own money. My! how good it feels to have a pocketbook of one's own. I feel like a free woman. [*Chuckling timidly*] He has only been dead a month and I have spent in that time [*whispers in* MARGARET'S *ear*]—there! [*Gets quite chipper and gay*] I don't dare say it out loud or Hezekiah would rise in his grave. [*She starts to go out then comes back, catching herself cautiously looking around as if to see if her husband's ghost were ready to reprimand her for her extravagance and what she is about to do*] I think I'll have more flowers. Aren't they for the living as well as the dead? I never could buy any when Hezekiah was alive because he wouldn't spend the money, but now — *now* — what's to

hinder? I have always loved flowers — I'll take that whole bunch of roses.

POLLY. There are three dozen here, Mrs. Knight.

[POLLY *puts them in a box.*]

MRS. KNIGHT. I don't care. Send them up. The whole three dozen! I think I'll have flowers every day in the year. Why shouldn't I? Who's to stop me? [*Looks fearfully over her shoulder again*] I will spend one hundred dollars a month, Miss Bell — cut flowers every day — yes, one hundred dollars a month — that is an order. Write it down quick. I'll come and pay you myself every month — in cash — the dear dollars — I love to feel them and they are mine too — mine — there's a beginning. [*Puts bills on the table*] Ho, ho, Hezekiah! Flowers every day! One hundred dollars a month! Now I'll get even, Hezekiah — I'll get even!

Chuckling to herself MRS. KNIGHT *goes out.*

MARGARET. The pity is, there are more Mrs. Knights in the world than one dreams of — and not all in mourning, either.

POLLY. [*Catching sight of* DAVE *in the conservatory*] All men are not like Hezekiah Knight.

MARGARET. Why no, dear, of course not.

POLLY. Some are generous and kind.

MARGARET. Certainly, child. It is the sys-

tem that is wrong. I have nothing against *men.*

RAMSEY. God knows they have a hard enough struggle.

MARGARET. I know the same struggle — the wear and tear — the anxiety.

POLLY. Then I don't see why you talk as you do.

MARGARET. Don't you see — I would rather face it myself than ask a man to do it for me.

POLLY. It is a man's *place.* I wouldn't marry a man if he wasn't glad to take care of me — excuse me, Miss Margaret. I am forgetting myself. [*Runs off.*]

RAMSEY. You have not made much impression upon your own girls, I must say. [*Throwing magazine upon table*] The child is right. You lead a lorn hope. Ha, ha! [*Laughs at her*]

POLLY. [*Announcing at the door*] Oh, Miss Margaret, the bride's coming. And the bridegroom, too. She wants to see her wedding bell I know.

Enter CORNELIA VON SCHLEGEL *and* MR. CHARLES DUNN. *She is an exquisite creature, picturesque but capable. He is a man of the world, faultlessly attired. He lingers in the outer shop to buy violets for* CORNELIA *and a boutoniere for himself.*

CORNELIA. How are you, Margaret?

[*They greet one another.*]

MARGARET. I have your orange blossoms.

[*Producing a box.*]

CORNELIA. [*Glancing at them and half caressing the wedding bell*] They are lovely. I am so happy and yet — I am troubled about something. Tell me, Margaret, would you really keep your flower shop — if you were married?

MARGARET. Yes. Why should I give it up?

CORNELIA. [*Hesitating — in a low voice, drawing her to one side, out of the hearing of* RAMSEY] But if — if — Stephen Hartwell should ask it?

MARGARET. [*With a catch in her voice*] Stephen Hartwell! Don't speak of him.

CORNELIA. But supposing he should come — and should ask you — to give it up — what then?

MARGARET. You mustn't suppose what is perfectly impossible, Cornelia.

CORNELIA. You love him. He will hear the call of it and come some day, and then what?

MARGARET. You forget — he doesn't love me.

CORNELIA. You never gave him a chance to tell you.

MARGARET. I wrote him. He did not answer.

CORNELIA. The letter may have been lost.

MARGARET. It is not likely. But why do you

ask me this? I have my work. I believe in it. I couldn't give it up.

CORNELIA. I wanted you to see how hard it is for *me* ——

MARGARET. [*Surprised into a louder tone*] Cornelia, you are not going to give up your studio?

CORNELIA. Yes, I have to.

MARGARET. I am sorry. Will you be happy without your work?

CORNELIA. No, but Charles feels *so* strongly about it. He says *he* is not interested in miniature painting. I think he is even now a little jealous of my work. He wants me all to himself. He loves me so much, I feel as if I must do as he wishes, don't you think I ought?

MARGARET. No. You shouldn't give up your work.

CHARLES. [*Drawing near*] What's this?

CORNELIA. Miss Bell thinks I ought not to give up my studio.

CHARLES. [*Uncomprehending*] What? Oh, how absurd! Come, my dear. The car is waiting. [*Hands her the violets.*]

CORNELIA. Oh, thank you. [*He goes. She follows to the door and then comes hastily back*] You see he is most thoughtful, Margaret. I can't bear to oppose him now. I know you are right,

dear; but after a while I am sure he will see it our way and let me have my studio.

MARGARET. [*Half smiling*] Never again! You are lost — hopelessly lost.

CORNELIA *and* CHARLES *go out.*

RAMSEY. So this is Margaret! I might have known it. [*He goes up to her, his manner very masterful*] I will tell you what is the matter with you. You need to be in love — thoroughly, madly, desperately in *love.*

MARGARET. Why?

RAMSEY. Then you would see the utter futility — and nonsense of all these notions of yours.

MARGARET. Notions! They are the actuating principles of my life.

RAMSEY. Nonsense, I say. There is only one actuating principle of a woman's life. The need to love and be loved.

MARGARET. Yes, under right conditions.

RAMSEY. Conditions! Ha, ha! Don't you know a woman who loves — with a love that is at all worthy of the name — never makes *conditions?* No, I tell you it is all false, this talk of freedom. Wait till you find yourself in the grip of the mighty forces of nature; wait till a live passion takes hold of your heart; your *ideas* will vanish like smoke.

MARGARET. I am not so weak as you think.

RAMSEY. Weak? You strong women are weaker than the weakest when you love.

MARGARET. Indeed we are not.

RAMSEY. You are. Shall I tell you why? Because of your very strength — you have more love to give. You were unyielding in your opposition to me years ago because you really did not love me.

MARGARET. I thought I did at the time.

RAMSEY. But you didn't. That is a proof of it. You will give all — a rich all and without question — to the man you love.

MARGARET. I shall never yield a principle.

RAMSEY. You will, I say.

MARGARET. Why do you think that?

RAMSEY. [*Masterfully*] You are a *woman*, like the rest. I know women. Once we get our hands on your *hearts* we can mould you to our will. We can do what we please with you — we are your masters — eternally your masters. That's another law of nature. It has nothing to do with the pocketbook, either. [*Looks her square in the eye.*] Do you mean to say you don't know I am right?

MARGARET *is silent.*

RAMSEY. Answer me.

MARGARET *turns away.*

RAMSEY. Your silence means but one thing. You do know and through your own personal experience. Then you have cared for some one since *we* separated — still silent! By Jove, there's nothing I'd like better than to see you head over heels in love like any other woman.

MARGARET. [*Her voice belying her words*] There is no probability that you will ever see that day.

RAMSEY. Hm. [*Eying her closely*] I wonder what sort of a man would do it. [*Teasingly*] Some weakling, probably. Some one you could make "a man" of — as they say,— eh?

[*Smiling at her.*]

MARGARET. [*Catching his humor*] I prefer a man already made — and made by himself ——

RAMSEY. Not one who *leans* on *you*, eh?

MARGARET. No.

RAMSEY. [*Sarcastically*] That is good! *You* want a strong man!

MARGARET. Of course.

RAMSEY. [*Smiling*] One that will beat the life out of you, eh?

MARGARET. [*With an amused flash*] If I had wanted that kind of strength I should never have dismissed *you*, William. [*Pauses*] There is a strength which is gentle.

RAMSEY. Hm. The Stephen Hartwell kind,

I suppose. [MARGARET *starts perceptibly*, RAMSEY *notices it*] Ha — what? We are on the scent at last. I remember now. I heard you had an affair with a rich man. He cared, they said, and you broke it off — suddenly disappeared. So he is the one! Stephen Hartwell, our talented attorney, likely to be "Judge" Hartwell soon, if I can silence his critics — I am managing his campaign. He is running on our ticket. So that's your "strength which is gentle," eh? Ha! It may cost him his office. His enemies say he has too much sympathy for a judge — too philosophic — that he has boasted he would never send anybody to prison if he could help it. But of course the poor will stand by him. I say, didn't you care for him? [MARGARET *betrays considerable agitation*] No, you couldn't have cared or — well, if you do you will have a chance to make it right. He came down on the same train with us. [MARGARET *turns in surprise*] Does he know you are here — working under an assumed name?

MARGARET. No, no.

RAMSEY. Then I will tell him.

MARGARET. You must not. [*Eagerly, forgetting herself*] *He is here? Now?*

RAMSEY. [*Looking at her*] God, you never looked like that for me — I see the end of your

flower shop. You a champion of woman? Ha, ha! Wait till I find Hartwell. [*Moves to door.*]

MARGARET. [*Protesting*] You will not bring him here?

RAMSEY. I certainly shall.

MARGARET. Not without my wish.

RAMSEY. [*Close to her*] Look here, you are dying to see him. You know it.

MARGARET. [*Faintly*] No — no.

RAMSEY. Then why are you so agitated? Oh, you women — you women! You are as transparent as — Look here! Do you know why I am going to bring him here? It is not to make you happy. I want to see the look on your face when you meet — I want to see you a mere, helpless, traditional woman in the grip of the forces of nature. I want to see Margaret Kendall *mastered* — do you hear — *mastered!* I'd give half my life to conquer you, you proud, beautiful woman! *I* couldn't. Hartwell may. I want to see. You are a brainy woman, Margaret, but there are things you need to learn ——

MARGARET. [*Quivering, stirred, proud, angry, in a low voice*] There are things *you* need to learn, William. Is there nothing in you but the instinct for mastership? Do you care nothing for the value of a woman's life for *itself?* I should like to see *you conquered.*

RAMSEY. [*Laughing*] *Me* conquered? How?

MARGARET. There is only one way I can think of — I would like to see you wedded to a woman who would assert her independence.

RAMSEY. [*Amused at her words — then face to face with her*] So in love, you'd throw freedom, flower shop to the winds — utterly conquered! down on your knees! to the man you love.

MARGARET. [*Taunting him*] Wedded to a wife who would *sing in public!* Ah, if Louise's voice would but return! How I would help her!

RAMSEY. You would do nothing of the kind.

MARGARET. I would, I would. See, you are afraid already.

RAMSEY. I should not allow it,— but thank God, there is not the slightest chance of your disturbing my domestic peace. Her voice is dead, and there is nothing else she can do.

MARGARET. Wait and see.

RAMSEY. [*In a low voice, threateningly*] Don't you dare to put any of your ideas into her head.

POLLY *knocks and opens door.*

POLLY. It is a lady,— on a personal matter.

MARGARET. Show her in.

Enter LOUISE RAMSEY, *a breezy, handsome woman, fine, erect carriage.*

MARGARET. Louise!

LOUISE. Margaret! [*They embrace*] William, you here? Why [*looks at the flushed faces of the two*], have you been quarreling?

MARGARET. Your husband and I are old antagonists. We always become aware of our very good fighting qualities when we meet.

LOUISE. William, dear, I am very anxious to see Margaret alone. It is so long since we met. Would you mind — er ——

RAMSEY. Yes, yes, certainly. I will go and call for you later. Besides, I think Miss Kendall and I have finished for a time. [*With meaning*] I will bring Stephen Hartwell with me, if I can find him, Miss Kendall. [MARGARET *flashes a glance at him. He turns to* LOUISE.] They are old friends, I believe.

MARGARET. You had better not *be long*, Mr. Ramsey.

RAMSEY. Indeed?

MARGARET. [*Significantly*] The flower shop may gain a convert.

RAMSEY. Not in my case. I am sure of my grip. [*Exit* RAMSEY.]

LOUISE. Heavens! How you must hate each other! What were you talking about?

MARGARET. Only the love of conquest. Now, tell me about yourself. Let me look at you. How happy you look — and beautiful still —

why, you are positively radiant. You always were like an April breeze. [*Kissing her.*]

LOUISE. Oh, my dear! I cannot keep the secret any longer — I have the most wonderful news to tell you. No one knows — not even William. The most marvellous thing has happened. It is a miracle.

MARGARET. Tell me.

[*They sit.*]

LOUISE. You could never guess! Oh, Margaret, Margaret! My voice has come back!

MARGARET. [*Rising and grasping her by the wrist*] No!

MARGARET *looks at the door through which* RAMSEY *has just passed.*

LOUISE. Yes — it is true. The same tones — timber — richness. I scarcely dare breathe it, but Margaret, it is even more glorious.

MARGARET. You have not told William?

LOUISE. No, not a word. [*Walking up and down*] Oh, if you could know the joy of it! Margaret!

MARGARET. [*Eagerly*] Have you tried it in public — thought of joining a company?

LOUISE. No, our town is so isolated, but I am praying for the chance. I thought when I reached New York I might find an old friend ——

MARGARET. Louise! your chance is here. Who do you think is in town! Ten Eyck!

LOUISE. Really!

MARGARET. Yes! His star has failed him. He wants some one at once — to-morrow!

LOUISE. Oh, Margaret! It was Providence that sent me here.

MARGARET. Would you do it? Would you join him?

LOUISE. [*Excited*] Yes, yes. I am fairly wild at the thought.

MARGARET. We will have him here in a few moments. [*Goes to the door*] Lena, will you call up the Opera House, please, and ask for Mr. Ten Eyck. Tell him I would like to see him here at once. It is very important.

LOUISE. Oh, thank you! Margaret dear [*walks about the room*], I can scarcely contain myself when I think of it. I am on the tiptoe of joy! To hold an audience in my grasp once more — to feel that multitude of hearts thrill and tremble at my will — the tones pouring from my throat, bearing me up, up to the very gates of heaven, then the intoxicating burst of applause at the end sustaining me there — oh! [*with ecstatic outburst*] God is so good to me!

MARGARET. [*Moved by* LOUISE'S *ardor*] To hear your enthusiasm I almost fancy my voice must return too. I have a thrill I haven't felt for years. Tell me how it all happened.

LOUISE. It was after the birth of my child.

LENA. [*Appears at the door*] Mr. Ten Eyck will be here in a few moments.

MARGARET. [*Eagerly*] Very well. Go on, Louise.

LOUISE. It was completely gone after that illness, just as yours was.

MARGARET. What did you do?

LOUISE. I stayed at home; utterly miserable and inconsolable. I know you were pluckier than I was; oh, yes, I heard of what courage you had, how you took your mother's name and began to raise violets for a living.

MARGARET. The violets helped me to forget — amused me until I saw that a life passion might be worked out even through violets.

LOUISE. But *I* — I was prostrated. Every night I prayed for my voice. Every morning I sprang out of bed trembling with hope — perhaps my prayer had been answered while I slept — but when I opened my mouth to sing there was that impossible veil over my throat. It was awful. I thought I should die.

MARGARET. And then?

LOUISE. [*Naively*] Well, then I married. There seemed to be nothing else to do. William has been a good husband; I love him, and he loves me. I have wanted for nothing. Life

has run along smoothly enough. I could never forget my voice — never. I have had to be content to be merely a wife. Then our little Louise was born — I forgot my sorrow. [MARGARET *listens with quick sympathy*] One morning she was crying. I began to croon a little, thinking only of soothing her. At the first note I almost fainted with joy, for Margaret, there was my voice, alive once more, loosed from the terrible bondage, greater than ever after the long sleep. I am transported with joy. Think of it! To have my husband, my baby, and now my voice, my art, my public! Am I not blessed above all women!

MARGARET. [*Putting her hands on* LOUISE'S *shoulders and looking her in the face*] My poor Louise!

LOUISE. What is it?

MARGARET. You are married to William Ramsey. Have you thought of that?

LOUISE. [*Alarmed*] What do you mean?

MARGARET. I am afraid your voice had better have stayed dead; unless — unless — tell me, have you the courage, do you seriously mean that you will sing to the world again?

LOUISE. Yes! A thousand times yes! [*With enthusiasm*] Am I not the artist as well as the woman? God gave me my voice as he gave me

my child. What is a voice without an audience — an adoring public? It is the air in which it breathes.

MARGARET. You will not let your marriage stand in the way?

LOUISE. [*Passionately*] A hundred marriages will not stop me! Why else did God return my treasure? To bury it again, hide it under a bushel? Ah no — I shall enter my kingdom — be once more a queen — there is none greater in the world than the queen of song! To her even the queen of state pays tribute.

MARGARET. Louise, stop — stop! You must realize a little of what is before you.

LOUISE. Nothing can prevent me.

MARGARET. You have not told your husband, spoken of all this to him.

LOUISE. No.

MARGARET. Why?

LOUISE. [*Pausing*] I don't know — I — I — I ——

MARGARET. I will tell you. Your instinct told you it wasn't safe.

LOUISE. Well, until I had something *definite* — I had a vague feeling he might not be interested— I wanted to see you first.

MARGARET. [*With a low, short, wild little laugh*] *Interested!* Hum.

LOUISE. Margaret — what do you mean? Speak out.

MARGARET. [*With strong and significant emphasis*] I mean this: that when you tell William Ramsey what you intend to do, the fight of your life is begun.

LOUISE. What?

MARGARET. Yes,— a grim fight — a life and death struggle as an artist. I know William Ramsey. What does he care for your *voice* — nothing! Let the wife try to be the singer! Ha, you will see!

LOUISE. Margaret!

MARGARET. William Ramsey would never have married you if you had not lost your voice —

LOUISE. Yes, he would. He loves me, Margaret ——

MARGARET. Put him to the test, now is your chance. Why, Louise, I know William Ramsey to the core. Kindness in all the details of life, but this one thing of woman's right to her own talent. Touch him there and he is harsh, cruel, bitter, and when you see this side of his nature you will feel every art instinct within you shrivel and dry up. You will not even desire to sing. Wait till you feel the mailed hand.

LOUISE. [*Protesting vigorously*] I can't believe my husband is as you say. I will not neglect him.

MARGARET. It isn't that. It is the idea — in the blood — generations back — centuries old.

LOUISE. What right has he to keep me from singing to the world?

MARGARET. No right, but he thinks he has. You are his wife. That is enough for him. You are dependent upon him for a living. If Ten Eyck will take you, are you ready to tell William Ramsey to-day?

LOUISE. I am not afraid. I will dare everything. The very thought of his presuming to interfere with my life as an artist makes me *furious*. Let me once see Ten Eyck.

MARGARET. [*Eagerly*] Then I will help you. I will stand by you. I could move mountains for you!

LOUISE. You are good to help me, Margaret.

MARGARET. [*With intense feeling*] It is not you alone I am helping — but through you, a thousand other women. Louise — you *must* sing — and sing as never before. You must conquer William Ramsey.

LOUISE. Margaret, what did William do to you that you are so fierce, so agitated?

LENA. [*Announces*] Mr. Ten Eyck, Miss Margaret.

Enter TEN EYCK.

MARGARET. Ah. [*Greets him*] Look, friend — do you see who it is?

TEN EYCK. Louise! [*Grasps both her hands.*]

MARGARET. My voice is dead, but Louise's — Louise's ——

LOUISE. It has come back.

TEN EYCK. No! Is it true?

MARGARET. More glorious than ever. There is your star, Ten Eyck.

TEN EYCK. Louise, are you ready to take up the work? Can you join the company at once?

MARGARET. [*Mischievously*] She has only to tell her husband.

TEN EYCK. [*His enthusiasm dropping several degrees*] Ah — there is a husband! What a pity!

MARGARET. And yet you were advising me!

TEN EYCK. When a woman wants to do any work, they are a nuisance.

LOUISE. [*Proudly*] It will make no difference in my case — I can adjust my life to suit myself. I have a splendid nurse for my child.

TEN EYCK. [*Temporizing*] The season is short.

MARGARET. There is no reason in the world, Ten Eyck,— once you convince her husband.

TEN EYCK. That is what I am afraid of. I do not like that husband idea, I must say. Will he stir up a row — object to anything? What do you think, Louise? Will he permit you?

LOUISE. [*Proudly*] Permit? This is enough, Ten Eyck. You are talking to the artist, Louise

van Anden. Private matters I am quite competent to care for in a private way.

TEN EYCK. Good! This is the old Louise, eh, Margaret? Well then,— can you come to the theater now? A rehearsal is going on. We can try your voice at once.

LOUISE. Yes, this moment. Oh, Margaret, isn't it like old times! If only you too ——

MARGARET. Never mind me. If you triumph I shall be happier than you can ever guess. If I were only sure of you ——

TEN EYCK. Yes. Will you sign a contract, Louise?

LOUISE. I will *sign anything!* — anything! Only let me sing — sing — sing! Let me get to the theater. Oh, I can wait no longer. [*Almost at door, turns back to* MARGARET] Do you doubt me, Margaret?

MARGARET. You have not yet had your *interview.*

LOUISE. What can I do to make you sure of me?

MARGARET. I am afraid when William *sees* the *contract* ——

LOUISE. He will destroy it? Never. I will tell you what I will do — I will send the contract *here* — for *you* to keep for me.

MARGARET. I shall not *give it up* except on

your order; and I shall hold you to it. Is it understood?

LOUISE. [*Laughing joyously*] Yes. Hold me to it. You will have no difficulty.

MARGARET. This door is nearer the Opera House.

LOUISE. Come, Ten Eyck. I am impatient. I will send the contract, Margaret. Oh, isn't it glorious!

[*Exeunt.*]

MARGARET. [*Calling after her*] Oh, Louise?

LOUISE. [*Without*] Yes?

MARGARET. Come back and tell me how your voice sounds in the theater ——

LOUISE. [*Without*] Yes, yes, I will ——

MARGARET. And how William takes the news.

MARGARET *laughs softly to herself as she gathers a bunch of roses from the table and moves across the room — murmurs "How William takes the news! Ha, ha!"*

Enter RAMSEY *with* STEPHEN HARTWELL, *a tall, dark-eyed, distinguished-looking man of a little over forty, slightly grayed at the temples; with the measured calm and quiet dignity of the judicial temperament, warmed by a rare human sympathy, at once deep, tender, and reserved, strong, thoughtful, compelling.* MARGARET *does*

not see him at first for he is standing behind some bay trees.

RAMSEY. Is my wife here?

MARGARET. [*Half turning*] She has just gone.

RAMSEY. Here is an old friend you will be glad to see.

MARGARET *turning fully about sees* STEPHEN HARTWELL. *She looks at him as if he had risen from the dead, her soul in her face. As she gazes at him and he at her, the flowers slowly slip from her arms to the floor.* RAMSEY *glances from one to the other, and with a final significant glance at* MARGARET *which she does not see, he goes out smiling to himself.*

HARTWELL. [*Taking a step toward her with outstretched arms*] "Margaret!"

Curtain

ACT II

Same Scene: a few moments later.

MARGARET *stands voiceless, motionless, unresisting in* HARTWELL'S *arms. Finally her head falls softly on his shoulder.*

MARGARET. You have come.

HARTWELL. [*Putting his hand upon her head and holding it back as he looks down into her face. His voice is deep, gentle, rich*] Margaret, Margaret, you do care.

MARGARET. Yes.

HARTWELL. You have cared all this while.

MARGARET. Yes.

HARTWELL. I read it in your face. You have suffered as I have. Why did you run away and hide yourself behind another name and a strange work? You saw how I loved you.

MARGARET. [*Drinking in the look of his face*] You have come! You have come! [*Puts her arms about him*] Oh, my dear!

HARTWELL. How could you leave me alone these three years — so hopeless, Margaret?

MARGARET. [*Brokenly*] I thought you had ceased to care.

HARTWELL. Not one word.

MARGARET. [*Drawing back*] My *letter?* Did you not receive it?

HARTWELL. No, when did you write?

MARGARET. The summer after I left.

HARTWELL. When I was abroad.

MARGARET. I have waited all this time for the answer.

HARTWELL. I looked a year for that letter. Then I gave up. But I couldn't forget. Day and night your eyes have been looking into mine, and you, you have thought of me ——

MARGARET. Always! Your voice, Stephen — how I have hungered for one single tone — how good it is to hear it now !— I lean upon it and gather strength. It is rest and music for one's soul.

HARTWELL. [*Caressing her*] My love! I have found you again. Oh, these lost three years. How shall we ever make them up! But we must not look backward; we shall have a happiness that will more than fill their measure. How I will care for you, Margaret. No work any more, dear. Luxury and ease await you,— ah, we shall be happy. You will soon forget this flower shop.

MARGARET. [*Moves from him, dazed, startled into recollection of something completely forgotten*] My flower shop! [*Gazes straight in front of her*] My flower shop. I had forgotten. Stephen, I

can't. [*Sinks into chair. Her voice is pleading, not defiant*] Unless it were possible for you to understand—oh, if you only could *understand*——

[HARTWELL *bends over her.*]

HARTWELL. Dear, what is it?

MARGARET *starts as if to speak, and then stops, looking up at him helplessly.*

HARTWELL. What is it you wish me to understand, Margaret? Tell me.

MARGARET *droops lovingly toward* HARTWELL *and shakes her head. Throughout the scene she finds it extremely difficult to present her case to* HARTWELL.

HARTWELL. You mean you cannot marry me?

MARGARET. [*Quietly*] I am afraid it is impossible.

HARTWELL. You *love* me?

MARGARET. Oh yes, yes. I love you. [*Kissing him passionately*] I love you.

HARTWELL. Then I don't understand. Tell me.

MARGARET. Do you know why I ran away from you?

HARTWELL. No. What was it?

MARGARET. Because I was poor.

HARTWELL. Margaret!

MARGARET. [*Gently*] There, you see! You cannot understand that. You are rich. You

don't know what it means for a woman to work for her living and be always independent.

HARTWELL. You are too proud, Margaret.

MARGARET. Yes, perhaps — but that was why I disappeared. I had lost my voice. I was humiliated. I felt the shame that a tropical bird must feel suddenly shorn of its color and brilliance, not knowing where to hide its head. I was so tired — oh, *so* tired ——

HARTWELL. Then why, *why* did you turn from me, at the very time when love should minister?

MARGARET. I longed to creep into the shelter of your arms and rest and forget. It would have been the peace of heaven.

HARTWELL. Why didn't you come, dear?

MARGARET. I was afraid that I would. That was the temptation.

HARTWELL. The temptation? You strange child! I don't understand.

MARGARET. It is this way. I have always despised a woman for marrying *simply* because she was tired of working and supporting herself. So many do. I did not want to be so weak — I saw you loved me. I knew you must soon speak. I wished to avoid it. I was afraid I would yield.

HARTWELL. But if you *loved* me, why should you not?

MARGARET. I feared my love might be

gratitude, might be the thing I despised, *because I was so tired.* I wanted to test it, to see if my feeling were really love; I wanted to stand on my own feet, to come to you in the glory of strength. Then I thought I could send for you in all honor. So when the little farm violets grew to this [*indicating the flower shop*], I wrote the letter *which never reached you.* I thought I had grown used to denials and sorrows and knew how to endure, but this was different. Somehow, I couldn't — [*With a little catch in her voice*] It has been hard, Stephen.

HARTWELL. No more sorrows, dear. I will drive them away — already your face is changing. Your beautiful face — I know every line of it.

MARGARET. I wrote for you to come, and when you didn't come I thought I had been mistaken in the signs, that you really didn't care for me as I had thought — so I gave up.

HARTWELL. But now that you know, now that you have won out so splendidly in your struggle and can come to me in the glory of your strength with a personal triumph such as few women even care to win — now that I am here — what is there in the way?

MARGARET. There is something else, which unless you understand — oh, *do* understand. I cannot give you up now. I thought I was

strong,— your presence teaches me how incomplete I am alone, shows me how greatly I need you. I love you. I cannot give you up.

HARTWELL. Nor shall I give *you* up. Why should I? What is there in the way?

MARGARET. [*Her head upon his shoulder, disarmed by his gentleness*] My work.

HARTWELL. Your work?

MARGARET. [*Lifting her head and gathering courage*] Yes — you see, it has become so much more to me than necessary self-support. It has taught me wonderful things about life—about other women, their needs,—and what I can do for them.

HARTWELL. Yes, dear?

MARGARET. I have become — through this little flower shop and the women who gather here every week — they are coming this very afternoon — I have become a teacher, a pioneer, a sort of forerunner. They look to me to set the example, to point the way ——

HARTWELL. To what, dear?

MARGARET. To freedom — and all that that means — opportunity, growth, happiness. Oh, for myself I could snatch at the joy — be your slave — kneel at your feet and be happy. But there are those who turn to me — I have a faith — I must be true to it — it is that which is in the way — unless you see it too. Oh, if you only could!

HARTWELL. What is the faith, dear?

MARGARET. [*Very gently*] I must be free! that I may teach freedom.

HARTWELL. You should be free — never by word or deed would I encroach on your freedom, Margaret.

MARGARET. You do not understand. If I marry you in the usual way I shall have to give up my freedom.

HARTWELL. No, dear — you will not.

MARGARET. [*Still very gently*] What to me is freedom. Tell me, could you marry me and let me keep my flower shop?

HARTWELL. But why should you? I am rich. I have more than enough for us both — for the rest of our lives.

MARGARET. I know that, dear. But do you not see, your possessions give you *your* freedom, not mine. I must have my own. It is not a whim, dear, but a deep-rooted belief which is sacred to me. I must prove to the world in my own personal life what I believe, that a woman should have her social work, and the income from it — all apart from the man she loves.

HARTWELL. You should have your own income, Margaret. I can arrange that.

MARGARET. [*Painfully going on*] It would still be your gift, dear, don't you see? I must earn

it myself, for the sake of my own integrity. Oh, if we could do this thing *together*, Stephen, show that freedom and love can go hand in hand — it would be so splendid!

HARTWELL. Isn't it a strange idea of freedom, Margaret — for a woman?

MARGARET. It is the basic freedom for both man and woman.

HARTWELL. [*Thoughtfully considering, with an effort to be perfectly fair*] Keep your flower shop — *as my wife.* Is that it?

MARGARET. [*Tensely waiting*] Yes.

POLLY *knocks and announces,* "MR. RAMSEY, MISS MARGARET." *Something of* MARGARET'S *defiance comes back at the mention of* RAMSEY'S *name. She rises to receive him.*

Enter RAMSEY. *He glances from one to the other in keen enjoyment.*

RAMSEY. By the way, did my wife leave any word for me — where she was going?

MARGARET. No, she left no word for you. She has something quite important to tell you, however.

RAMSEY. Indeed?

MARGARET. Yes. I think I am safe in saying that the flower shop has gained a convert — an ardent convert.

RAMSEY. [*Lightly*] Oh? Nothing serious. [*Glances at* HARTWELL *and says to* MARGARET *as he crosses to him*] How is my traditional woman coming on?

MARGARET. [*Under her breath*] You are cruel.

RAMSEY. [*To* HARTWELL] Have you seen the *News* this morning, Hartwell? They attack you again — on the same old score.

HARTWELL. For being too human? I suppose so.

RAMSEY. Yes — too lenient — but this time it's "too friendly toward the criminal classes." Fortunately I have the "Press" under my control — so don't worry! I'll look out for it.

HARTWELL. Yes, I rely on your management. [*Turning to* MARGARET] Mr. Ramsey usually puts through what he undertakes.

RAMSEY. Now, about my wife — Miss Kendall — will you please explain ——

HARTWELL. [*Crossing to* MARGARET] I think I will just step across the street for a few moments. It is evidently something personal.

RAMSEY. Don't let me send you off, Mr. Hartwell — I only want to see Miss Kendall a moment.

HARTWELL. I shall be back directly. [*To* MARGARET] Let him have his say.

MARGARET. Don't be long.

HARTWELL. No. [*Exit*]

RAMSEY. [*To* MARGARET] Where did you say my wife was?

MARGARET. [*Absent - mindedly, thinking of* HARTWELL, *her face luminous*] I didn't say.

RAMSEY. Well — to be perfectly explicit — *where did she go* when she left here?

MARGARET. To the theater.

RAMSEY. To the theater? Oh, to get seats for to-night, of course.

MARGARET. Possibly.

RAMSEY. Where is she now then — she isn't at the hotel. I have been looking everywhere.

MARGARET. You didn't happen to glance in at the costumer's, I suppose?

RAMSEY. Costumer's? No! What do you mean? What is she up to? What idea have you put into her head?

MARGARET. I wouldn't get excited, William. She will probably give a full account of herself when she returns.

RAMSEY. I am not excited; but I don't see what the mystery is, why I am not to know where she is.

MARGARET. Can't your wife move without your knowing where she is? So completely the master, I suppose.

RAMSEY. You know more than you are telling.

I can see that. There is some secret between you. But then, you are perfectly right. There is no reason for my being worried.

MARGARET. Or curious.

RAMSEY. Or curious. Louise is quite able to take care of herself.

MARGARET. Quite.

POLLY *knocks and enters with a large envelope* MARGARET *goes to receive it.*

POLLY. It was left by a special messenger.

MARGARET. Ah, from the theater. [*Signs*] Thank you. I was looking for it.

[*Glances at contents with evident pleasure.*]

RAMSEY. [*Down front, to himself*] Costumers! What in the world — costumers — Hm. [*To* MARGARET] How is my champion of woman? I can see she has made progress. I told you it was all a figment of your fancy, nothing but dream stuff — your preachments on freedom. Still [*teasingly*] I didn't think the conquest would be so easy. [*Sincerely*] You really do care for him, don't you? Flower shops and principles are pretty cold, tame affairs once the fire flames in your heart. Isn't it so? Own up! [*Admiringly*] Jove, you are more beautiful than you ever were before — more tender, more womanly — yes, Margaret subdued, Margaret mastered is really very lovely — quite tempting, in fact.

[*Seriously*] You realize now that *love* is worth more than any *flower shop* in the world, don't you? [*Lightly*] When do you give it up?

MARGARET. [*Abstractedly*] I shall not give it up.

RAMSEY. What! Does he consent to your keeping it?

MARGARET. He may.

RAMSEY. Not Hartwell. He is proud. What a spectacle he would make — a rich man with a wife running a little business like this. Ha ha! Truly, would you put him in such a position?

MARGARET. [*Half to herself*] I never thought of that!

RAMSEY. What would his friends think of you? What would his family say? Have you ever seen his relatives? Well, they are an aristocratic lot, I can tell you, — all of the South. You marry him and you marry his sisters, cousins, and his aunts, to say nothing of an uncle or two thrown in. Really, it is amusing. What will you do if he refuses?

MARGARET. [*Troubled*] I don't know.

RAMSEY. Throw him over, as you did me?

MARGARET *is silent and moves away from him. She looks at the door through which* HARTWELL *passed.*

RAMSEY. [*Watching her*] So you declared your

independence to Hartwell, the man you love. Your heart isn't as big as I thought.

MARGARET. What do you mean?

RAMSEY. There is only one way for a woman like you to love and that is *completely*, in absolute surrender. Here you have actually made terms for your love, insulted it with an attempt at a bargain! I didn't think it of you, Margaret.

MARGARET. [*Roused*] Terms! A bargain!

RAMSEY. Yes, isn't it that? Isn't it? I will marry you if you will do thus and so. I will give you my love — if you will accept my terms. Pshaw! what a way to love! You are a good deal of a disappointment, Margaret.

MARGARET. No, no. It is my faith.

RAMSEY. Talk! If you truly loved him you'd realize that the living flesh and blood man is more to you than a lot of inanimate plants and silly customers. Why, you couldn't live a day without him.

MARGARET. You don't understand. It is a matter of principle.

RAMSEY. Men can fight for principles, not women.

MARGARET. I have sworn to be the one woman who can. It is for freedom.

RAMSEY. Freedom! By Jove, you've got it! Look at it! Do you want to know its other

name? I will tell you. *Loneliness*, spelled in great big black letters. *LONELINESS*. [MARGARET *bends and weakens under his insistent words as if they were blows*] Can't I see how lonely you are? Old age to face — not so far off, either — alone and childless. What a spectacle — *a childless woman*. [*Speaking in a low, rapid voice as he stands above her*] Your heart cries out for this man — it is only a question of time till you surrender,— else you are not the magnificent Margaret I think you are. You will answer that cry of your heart in the one supreme way. You are in the mighty grip now. You feel it tearing at the roots of your being. You can scarcely keep your hold on your ideals, they are like balloons cut away from the earth — soon they will be lost to sight. Nature is too strong, Margaret. The instinct for motherhood is too strong, and Nature put that instinct there, gave it absolute and undying power over a woman's life. That is why you women never get anywhere in your struggle for liberty. Your own hearts are your enemies — not men. That is why you cut so ridiculous a figure with your little flower shops and ballots — you are coping with mightier forces than social systems — your own great divine instinct of motherhood—you are grappling with God himself — you can't kill it. It will triumph to the

end. And you, Margaret, you are made to be a mother, a glorious mother — look at you! There is no woman like you. You are superb, a goddess, created for love. Yes, you cannot keep it out of your face — you are quivering at the truth of my words — the cold flower-shop woman is going — the real woman shines in your eyes — the Margaret you should have been with me years ago. You a champion of freedom! Ha, ha! You are just a plain elemental woman — infinitely more worth loving in your weakness than in your defiance, splendid though it was. Your true life, your happiness, lies the way of love, as it does with every other woman. Isn't it so? You passionate woman! Don't you know your own nature?

MARGARET. Yes.

RAMSEY. You admit it, then?

MARGARET. [*With answering passion full of personal pain*] Why should I not? It is true. I do hunger for love — no need to have *you* tell me — every lonely woman knows for herself — I long to pour out my love with all the devotion of which I am capable, I yearn to *be* loved, I could cry for the little arms about my neck — yes, I feel all these things. But no matter what you say, you can't make me forget the *other women*, their helplessness and their needs. Passionate

woman! *Yes!* But I am capable of a passion you cannot conceive — a passion for a free and noble womanhood. Passionate woman! Ah! Do you think I could cling to a mere dream of the future, be ready to sacrifice my personal joy for an ideal, if it were not so, if I were not *alive* in every atom of my being? I am not alone. There is a ferment stirring the hearts of all women — I am a part of it, I can't help myself. My flower shop is its symbol — I hold to it as a liberator to his flag — a priest to his vows ——

RAMSEY. [*Strongly, contemptuously*] Humph! A priest to his vows! What are a priest's *vows* when he is *alone* with the woman he loves? They are nothing before the eternal rush and sweep of the forces nature planted in our hearts. Already your words have lost the ring of conviction. The woman — what nature demands of you as a woman *now* — not some dim unimaginable future — is already dominant. It is she who will be heard. She who will triumph. [*Lowering his voice*] You have caught a glimpse of that man's face — heard his voice — you will die, but you must hear it again — you love him — you have his kiss upon your lips — you have tasted of the wine of life — the immortal intoxication — you must drink to the very dregs. There is no stopping ——

MARGARET. [*Aware that he is reading her heart and choking with feeling*] Be still! Be still ——

RAMSEY. You are mastered at last! Admit it! Admit it!

MARGARET. [*In distress*] Oh, I will not talk to you any more. Please to go!

RAMSEY. You are right, of course. I beg your pardon. Hartwell is waiting, and I must find Louise. [*Starts for door and stops short, looking sharply at her*] I begin to suspect something. If she isn't at the hotel I am coming back and you'll have to tell me where she is. Look here, Margaret, I won't have any of this silly flower-shop independence from Louise. If you have put any of your ideas into her head, or put her up to anything — well, you'll have to pay for it.

MARGARET. [*Gestures impatiently for him to go*] Yes, yes.

RAMSEY. [*Going*] I won't have it, I say.

[*Exit* RAMSEY.]

MARGARET *moves about restlessly, stops at table, thinks hard. Enter* HARTWELL.

MARGARET. [*Goes eagerly to meet him, her love shining in her face — murmurs*] I am so glad.

HARTWELL. [*Tossing a newspaper on the table and taking her in his arms*] There, I have you again.

MARGARET. Is it serious — the paper's attack?

HARTWELL. Rather bitter, yes — but Ramsey can handle it. [*Changing his tone*] I thought he would never go. I have been waiting for him to come out.

MARGARET. He may come back.

HARTWELL. [*Protesting*] No!

MARGARET. I am afraid so. He said he would if his wife were not at the hotel; he is looking for her. I know she's not there. I shall have to tell him where she is. She wants to sing — you see ——

HARTWELL. Let us talk about you, dear — *you.*

MARGARET. [*Looking at watch*] And it is almost time for my women to come, and these moments are so precious.

HARTWELL. [*Brushing her hair back from her brows and framing her face with his hands*] Do you know, dear, you grow more beautiful every moment — tell me, sweetheart, nothing shall stand in our way?

MARGARET. [*Trembling — hesitatingly*] If you could only say — Keep your flower shop,——

HARTWELL. You would marry me?

MARGARET. Yes.

HARTWELL. [*Gently*] Really, Margaret, I don't see how it is possible! Why, how could I bring myself to put you in a doubtful position — a

position people would question and criticize — they might hurt you cruelly ——

MARGARET. [*Ardently*] That is nothing — I am not afraid — but don't say a doubtful position, Stephen. It is really glorious.

HARTWELL. [*With great gentleness*] It is very brave, dear, and glorious, too, when you are standing alone, but when you have a husband who loves you, adores you — who would serve you devotedly with the whole of his life, I confess I should feel most unchivalrous, Margaret, to let you do it — yes — even guilty — in some sort of way.

MARGARET. Oh, no!

HARTWELL. Can you not understand how a *man* might feel in this matter, a man who loves greatly, as I do you?

MARGARET. How do you mean, dear?

HARTWELL. I have the feeling,— feudal, ancestral, it may be, all men who love reverently must have it — the desire to protect the woman I love, to save her from pain and hardship, to spare her the sordid things of life.

MARGARET. Yes, I know; it is very beautiful, but ——

HARTWELL. It is the instinct which has lifted man out of barbarism and endowed him with whatever there is of good in his nature to-day —

this very instinct to work for the woman he worships. For the good of society it should be preserved at all costs. It is the heart and goal of all his efforts — the one restraining, refining force in his life. It spiritualizes and ennobles him as motherhood does a woman. To what level would men sink, deprived of this supreme privilege? Can you not see, Margaret? I speak out of the inheritance of the ages. It is the need, the vital need of a man's love.

MARGARET. [*Moves a little way — and murmurs as if to herself*] Yes, it is true—but the women — *their* needs — what does it do for them? Idols — sex creatures. Oh, *I want* them to be *more* than that!

HARTWELL. [*Following*] Margaret, you do love me?

MARGARET. [*Turns*] Look in my face!

HARTWELL. Yes, you do. Then why am I not all? With that wonder look in your eyes, why do you hesitate — how can you think of your work? Oh, say yes at once, Margaret! Your eyes say it — let the lips speak. Margaret, Margaret!

MARGARET. [*Turning away in despair*] I cannot. I was afraid it was useless — you cannot understand.

HARTWELL. Can you not choose, Margaret?

MARGARET. [*Helplessly*] It is not a question of choice, don't you see?

HARTWELL. It looks that way to me, dear; as if it were a choice between your flower shop and me.

MARGARET. Ah, I have hurt you. [*In pain*] Dear! Forgive me. I am so sorry. [*Caressing him*] I cannot help it. I am thinking of the other women. Don't you see how hard it is for me?

HARTWELL. And you would let love go?

MARGARET. Would you?

HARTWELL. Not easily. I must think it out. I cannot grasp it yet. It is all so new — woman has always been for me a creature to be set apart, kept beautiful. I see many obstacles in the way. You must remember I too am proud, Margaret, proud as you.

MARGARET. Yes. It is that which has kept us apart so long. Pride with both of us.

HARTWELL. Shall we let it wreck our lives now? Shall we, Margaret? Shall we let this precious love slip from out our grasp? Love! — think what that means.

MARGARET. No, no, but what can I do? Oh, can't you find a way?

HARTWELL. If you were a singer, an artist, it would be comparatively easy, but in the commercial world, the prejudices of my family, the

criticism they may subject you to — my own sense of chivalry — I must think it out, dear.

POLLY *knocks and announces* MR. RAMSEY.

POLLY. Mr. Ramsey says he must see you for a moment.

MARGARET. There he is!

POLLY. And the women are beginning to come for their meeting, Miss Margaret.

MARGARET. They must wait — it is not yet time.

HARTWELL. I am not going to be driven off this time. May I go in here?

He takes newspaper, and kissing her hand, goes into conservatory, smiling back at her. MARGARET *follows to the door, which she closes. She turns away with the reflection of his smile on her face, and meets* RAMSEY *as he enters.*

RAMSEY. Well, she isn't at the hotel. Now then — [*looks around*] Hartwell gone?

MARGARET. [*Shakes her head*] He's in there.

RAMSEY. [*Looking keenly at her face*] Hm! In the grip — in the grip of the mighty forces!

MARGARET. [*Raising her hand*] Don't.

RAMSEY. The traditional woman — eh? Ha ha!

MARGARET. Don't! You have tortured me enough. [*At the table, her eye falls on contract* —

she takes it up] Now I will torture you. If I am conquered by the old truth, so you shall be by the new. Louise ——

RAMSEY. Yes, Louise — That's just what I want to know — What about her? Quick! What has that paper to do with it?

MARGARET. William, what if Louise should return to the stage?

RAMSEY. What! What are you talking about? She has no voice.

MARGARET. Do you know why she looked so radiantly happy this morning?

RAMSEY. I did not notice it specially. She has looked that way since the baby came. She is naturally a buoyant disposition. You would gratify me by coming to the point at once.

MARGARET. I will. You said she had no voice. You are mistaken. She has — her voice has come back.

RAMSEY. Nonsense! I have known nothing of it. Why has she not told me?

MARGARET. She knew better. A vague instinct told her that it would not fare well at your hands; you might not approve of its being heard again in the old, fascinating, beautiful way.

RAMSEY. She is perfectly right. I do not approve — most certainly I do not. I shall lose no time in telling her so. She can do nothing

with her voice now. She must be mad if she contemplates the possibility even for a moment. She has her duties to me, to her child. She has chosen the domestic life. She must abide by it.

MARGARET. No — she cannot. She has heard the imperious call of the footlights — that mad, irresistible, witching call. Her voice is thrilling in her throat. To-morrow it will soar from the cords which have bound it. And a thousand men and women will listen spellbound and captive ——

RAMSEY. She will do nothing of the sort. She will not oppose my wishes in this matter.

MARGARET. She will.

RAMSEY. She hasn't your spirit, I am glad to say.

MARGARET. I will pour my spirit into her.

RAMSEY. It is my influence, not yours, that counts.

MARGARET. Then I will convince you. She sings to-morrow night at the Opera House. The rehearsal was glorious — see — here is her note — just a word scribbled in the excitement. She is with our old manager, Ten Eyck. Doubtless she is at the costumers now, making ready.

RAMSEY. [*Raging*] I never heard of such an irresponsible procedure — and without consulting me. It is not like Louise — in the least.

MARGARET. The divine gift transforms a woman — she will defend it as if it were her child.

RAMSEY. I can soon put a stop to it.

MARGARET. How?

RAMSEY. How! I shall simply forbid it.

MARGARET. I thought you would do that, so I had her send the contract here to me.

RAMSEY. Contract!

MARGARET. [*Holds it up*] Yes. You business men respect a contract, do you not?

RAMSEY. [*Furious*] Without my knowledge! or permission! How did she dare!

MARGARET. Yes, a signed contract, for six weeks, beginning to-morrow night. See, here is her signature, Louise van Anden Ramsey.

RAMSEY. Give it to me.

MARGARET. No, indeed. Your wife shall sing in public. *Your wife*, William. Think of it. Do you remember how you used to tell me what discomfort you would suffer, what humiliation you would undergo as the husband of a prima donna — how the sound of the clapping hands would hurt you, how the press notices and bill boards would cut you to the quick — it would be hard even to hold up one's head in the noisy publicity of it all — Do you remember? I told you how foolish and selfish it was — and now — think of it, William — you are going to experience

it all — all! Your wife is going to sing. Do you grasp the idea, William? She is an opera star.

RAMSEY. [*Facing her*] How dare you do this thing?

MARGARET. [*Taunting him*] Wedded to an opera queen — Think of it! What will people say? How will it look? Now are *you* conquered, William Ramsey ——

RAMSEY. She has no right to do this thing. Nor you neither.

MARGARET. No right?

RAMSEY. She is my wife.

MARGARET. Yours, yours! Because you feed her and clothe her and house her! [*Impetuously and passionately*] Wouldn't it make a difference if she could do these things for herself? Then she would have the right to her own life — the right to satisfy every one of her instincts — all the play and art and joy and service of which she is capable — without asking her master's leave. Now she is *your wife* — the human being whose wings you have a right to clip, whose genius you can stifle — because she hasn't her own freedom — her *own flower shop. Now* do you understand?

RAMSEY. [*Impervious*] Contract or no contract — I say she shall not sing.

MARGARET. But she shall! I hold her to it. Ten Eyck holds her also.

RAMSEY. I command you to give me that paper. It concerns my wife, my honor. Why in the name of heaven do you make it *your affair?*

MARGARET. Because she is a woman — a woman who wants to be free.

RAMSEY. [*Coldly*] Have you any idea of how much damage a woman like you can do, how many contented hearthsides you can ruin? You sow seeds of dissension and unhappiness. Men will hate you for it.

MARGARET. It doesn't matter — Louise sings.

RAMSEY. Never. Give me that paper. Then I shall use force.

He tries to get it — she deftly eludes him — thrusting it in her dress.

MARGARET. [*Throwing him off*] No!

RAMSEY *looks furious enough to subdue her and drag it forth. His anger as he gazes at her slowly and subtly changes to admiration.*

RAMSEY. [*Close to her — under his breath*] God — Margaret — I don't know whether I hate you or love you. You are like one of those Teuton warrior women — forest and all. [*Dashing his hand across his face*] Memories come crowding back — days when we thought we were meant for one another. The touch of you has fired my blood —— [*moves as if to seize her.*]

MARGARET. William! [*Locks contract in table drawer*] Not without Louise's consent.

RAMSEY. [*Recovering himself — goes to door*] Very well. [*Turns and comes back*] You interfere with my life. I shall interfere with yours.

MARGARET. How?

RAMSEY. You intend to marry Hartwell. I shall delay — prevent the marriage.

MARGARET. You!

RAMSEY. Yes, I! I know how. So go on with your poverty-stricken ideas of happiness — a childless woman — old age to face — alone! Margaret and her flower shop. Ha ha!

[*Goes to door.*]

MARGARET. [*Following*] What are you going to do?

RAMSEY. You will see.

MARGARET. William, don't leave this room until you have told me what you are going to do.

RAMSEY. Very well, I will. [*Comes down*] Stephen Hartwell has political honors to win. He has bitter enemies — men who attack him for his sympathy with the poor and criminal classes. I can stand for all that and fight his battles honestly, but I refuse to allow anything further of an extreme or eccentric nature to enter the campaign.

MARGARET. What do you mean?

RAMSEY. If he marries you that is what will happen. You with your flower shop ——

MARGARET. Well?

RAMSEY. That is not the worst — you have ideas — radical ideas of woman, marriage, freedom, which you propound publicly — ideas which are utterly distasteful to me and to most men. If Hartwell marries you he will have to stand sponsor for these ideas — he with his position and fortune — at the very threshold of his life's opportunity — a judgeship! Why, to the serious criticism we have had would be added ridicule — laughter! There would be no chance for him. The press would be full of it.

MARGARET. You said you had the press in your hands. You could take care of that.

RAMSEY. Ah, but that is just what I cannot and will not do. What! Protect the woman who breaks up my home — sends my wife on the stage? You must have taken leave of your senses, Margaret.

MARGARET. [*Gazes at him in astonishment*] Tell me the worst that could happen — if he should marry me.

RAMSEY. If the woman question is dragged in, and it will be, Hartwell may stand for it— I can't. It will be impossible for us to work together. I shall withdraw my support.

MARGARET. That means another candidate?

RAMSEY. It does. It means failure for him — the end of his career. He won't have another such chance in a hurry. Now then, give up that contract — be silent with Louise — undo your work with her — or I shall tell Hartwell how the matter stands. I will give you an hour to decide. [MARGARET *is fairly paralyzed*] I always thought you selfish, Margaret,— but I fancy you will scarcely go so far as to ruin the career of the man you love.

MARGARET. William — you couldn't — you wouldn't do this ——

RAMSEY. I mean what I say. I can handle all criticism but this. I refuse to stand for the flower shop. [*Goes out.*]

The door thrown open as RAMSEY *passes out shows a group of women gathered for a meeting. Their voices, laughing and chatting, rise and fall, gaining steadily in volume as their number increases throughout the following scene.* POLLY *guards the door. She closes it quickly at a swift sign from* MARGARET, *who after a moment goes to the conservatory door and opens it.*

MARGARET. Stephen!

[*Enter* HARTWELL.]

HARTWELL. He has gone? [*Starting*] Margaret, what is the matter? You are pale. What has Ramsey said? What has he done? Tell me.

MARGARET. Oh, Stephen, what shall we do? I can't marry you now, even if you should let me keep the flower shop ——

HARTWELL. What?

MARGARET. I can't ruin your career — no — no — I can't do that.

HARTWELL. What do you mean? What has Ramsey told you?

MARGARET. He is so angry with me about his wife. If you marry me he will withdraw his support ——

HARTWELL. Nonsense!

MARGARET. He will do as he says. I see it all.

HARTWELL. I don't care what Ramsey says.

MARGARET. But *I* care. It may mean the sacrifice of your life's work.

HARTWELL. And you can't give up the flower shop — be just a wife. I see that.

MARGARET. [*Struggling with herself, locking and unlocking her hands*] Oh, Stephen, how can I? Not my work, my ideals, those women out there and all I have done for them — oh, how can I! Ask anything but that. [*With large impulsiveness*] Take *me*, dear — my life, myself, my heart — all that I am — even — [*hesitates.*]

HARTWELL. [*Comprehending, folding her in his arms*] You brave, precious woman!

MARGARET. It is the only way now — love's way — if not the world's — but let it be so. I am yours — absolutely — do with me as you will.

HARTWELL. [*Tenderly*] But I love you too. Much as I might want you, I shall never do you any harm.

MARGARET. You could not. Your love is an infinite blessing. You have placed a crown on my head that will always be there — do you not see it — a mystic, light-shedding crown?

HARTWELL. [*Kissing her*] It is the light of your own loveliness.

MARGARET. [*Closing her eyes*] And on my lips, invisible jewels. [*With an apprehensive change*] Oh, I cannot lose you now — now that you have come. No, no, I love you — I love you. [*Clinging to him*] I need you. You are life itself — all its joy — and I have been so wretchedly lonely — I cannot give you up — I cannot. Take me. Anything, dear — have it any way you will.

HARTWELL. To cast a shadow on your life in the eyes of society — no, dear — never that.

MARGARET. I am not in society. I am a working woman.

HARTWELL. But I want you in society — my society. I am proud of you, Margaret — you

are a queen among women — I want the world to know you mine. I want you at my side. I should have next to nothing of you that other way. Think, dear. I want a wife in my house, to go about with me — to receive my friends — to share my life — all of it — the days and the nights — I want you, Margaret ——

MARGARET. [*In despair*] How is it possible?

HARTWELL. We must find a way. See, dear, I am going now — I shall do my best to clear away every obstacle — my own prejudices — Ramsey's objections. If I succeed I shall be here at eight o'clock. If I do not, I had best go on my journey,— I will not come back — not to-night.

MARGARET. [*Clinging to him*] No, no.

HARTWELL. Until I can understand — until every barrier in the way of our marriage is removed. It is better so. We should only agonize each other. Let me hear once more you love me.

MARGARET. I do, I do.

The noise of the women's talk outside becomes more insistent.

HARTWELL. [*With sudden ardor*] Oh, Margaret — can't you feel it — love is the supreme good of life — there is nothing beside it — and we have both been so starved. I must have you. You will not let me go away? If I am not here

at eight and can't find a way for us, you will change your mind — give up the work — write to me — send for me — I must have you.

The doors suddenly fall slightly ajar and the gay, eager voices of the women seem to leap into the room.

MARGARET. [*Starting*] They are coming!

HARTWELL. [*Still holding her, screened by the plants from the entrance*] Good-bye for a little while — [*kissing her*] only a little while. [*At the door*] If I do not come I shall wait for your word.

[*Goes out.*]

MARGARET. [*Dazedly*] Eight o'clock—eight—

THE WOMEN. Now we may come in! Oh, Margaret ——

MARGARET *pulls herself together with a tremendous effort and turns to greet the women as they rush upon her and surround her, exclaiming, "Margaret, you dear,"— "I've a piece of good news"— "I've sold all my work."—"I've a question to ask you."—"My husband says what if"—"My husband says so too." While* MARGARET *stands in the midst, tall, white, swaying, a faint struggling smile of welcome on her lips.*

Curtain

15 min.

ACT III

Same scene: evening of the same day. The room glows softly with dim lights. The doors at the back are open—an illumined street clock may be seen through the shop window. The hands are at 7.40.

Present: MR. *and* MRS. RAMSEY, *who have evidently just come in, and* DAVE.

RAMSEY. [*Looking at his watch*] You say she will not be back until eight o'clock?

DAVE. I don't think so, sir. She may be early. All I know is she told me to wait until eight. She expects some one then.

RAMSEY. Hm. Provoking! Well — we will wait, I think, if you don't mind.

DAVE. [*Goes out*] Yes, sir.

LOUISE. [*Timidly*] I should so much rather see Margaret alone.

RAMSEY. [*Tries the drawer of desk*] Locked, of course — and taken the key with her. [*Sits down and pretends to read a paper.*

LOUISE. William, sweetheart! [*Approaches him affectionately yet fearfully — withdraws, chilled by the aspect of his unresponsive, determined face — once more timidly tries to pet him*] William, aren't you going to speak to me? You haven't spoken

to me for over an hour. [*Silence*] I haven't done anything wrong — [*Silence*] I just want to sing — [*Silence*] Don't you love me, William? You have always been so good to me. I love *you.*

RAMSEY. Love!

LOUISE. But I *do* love you ——

RAMSEY. Prove it — then.

LOUISE. [*In a wheedling voice*] Why, dearie, I can't help it if I want to sing, can I? If you only knew the joy of it — can't you imagine it, dear? You like to smoke and play golf — [*breaking off*] you can't stop a bird from singing ——

RAMSEY. No one will stop you in the proper place — the four walls of your own home.

LOUISE. But the opera — the audience — is like sunshine — just what the air and the sun are to the bird. Ah, dearie, please let me? Say yes — you will? I know you will.

RAMSEY. [*Bringing down an emphatic hand*] Louise, there is no use discussing the matter any further — I shall not allow it. [*Pause*] I'll do anything for you,— buy you anything you want, only you must get this idea out of your mind at once. [*Walks up and down*] Why, you are positively crazy, Louise! [*Pause.*] [*Explosively*] I do not wish you to do it — that is enough; or ought to be enough for any wife who loves her husband. If you insist upon deliberately choosing

to make me unhappy — I have already told you what the end is likely to be.

LOUISE. That all is over between us? No, not that!

RAMSEY. It is the logical result.

LOUISE. But William — you'd be so proud of me!

RAMSEY. Proud! Fat, stupid tenors singing love songs in your face, putting their arms about you! [*Strides across the room*] My wife! Tights, perhaps! Proud! Good God! It makes me sick!

LOUISE. [*Tentatively, and looking contemplatively at the toe of her boot, as a child teasing for a treat might do, and unable to accept the inevitable*] Well, I have promised Ten Eyck — and Margaret.

RAMSEY. [*Sitting down*] You will have to settle with Margaret — I have already notified Ten Eyck.

LOUISE. [*Starting*] William! You have ——

RAMSEY. *Notified Ten Eyck.*

LOUISE. *What?*

RAMSEY. That he might consider the matter cancelled.

LOUISE. [*Angrily*] You — you — how dared you do that! How dared you! It is *my* affair — Love me! You don't love me a bit.

[*On the verge of tears, she starts for the door.*]

RAMSEY. [*Rising quickly and taking her in his arms*] I do love you — you know it. I love you so much I don't want to give up one bit of you to the world — I want to keep you mine — all mine. Surely this means something to you? [*Holding her more closely and kissing her warmly*] You don't want to give up this?

LOUISE *whips out her handkerchief, her taut nerves give way at this demonstration of affection, and bursting into tears, she starts again for the door.*

RAMSEY. Where are you going?

LOUISE. To my room — I am not going to stay here and let Margaret see me cry.

RAMSEY. [*Detaining her*] You will come back — promise me — and tear up that contract? [*Pointing to the locked table drawer.*]

LOUISE. [*Wildly*] Oh — I don't know what I'll do ——

RAMSEY. [*Releasing her hand and speaking with tenderness*] If you love me — you will.

[LOUISE *goes out.*]

RAMSEY. The devil! Shall I never get this thing settled! [*To* DAVE *in the conservatory*] There is no use in my waiting here. Tell Miss Kendall that Mr. Ramsey will be in later. Mrs. Ramsey may return — she may not — I don't know. You can never tell what a *woman* is

going to do. Gad — and that's a fact, young fellow!

[RAMSEY *goes.*]

DAVE. [*Whistles*] Whew! What's up!

[*Goes to move some plants about, whistling happily to himself.*]

Enter at side door MARGARET *in an evening wrap.*

MARGARET. Good evening, Dave. Has any one been here?

DAVE. The gentleman you were expecting? No — m'm — it isn't eight o'clock yet — you said eight.

MARGARET. I know it, but I thought perhaps he might be early — [*glances at the street clock*] In less than half an hour!

DAVE. A lady and gentleman were here — the name was — [*hesitates.*]

MARGARET. Ramsey?

DAVE. Yes, that's it — they're coming again— *he* is, anyway—they seem to be having trouble—

MARGARET. I shouldn't wonder — [*to herself*] Poor Louise. [*She moves about the room expectantly, nervously, looking out at the clock; gathers up an armful of lilies as if to arrange them, drops them on the table, murmurs to herself*] If he shouldn't come—[*makes a distracted gesture, and then notices* DAVE] You needn't wait any longer, Dave.

DAVE. [*Self-consciously*] I was to meet Polly here. We're going to the dance across the street.

MARGARET. [*With an attempt at cheeriness*] Oh, I thought you looked dressed up. Here is a white rose for your buttonhole. [*Puts it in for him*] You're a good boy, Dave. [*Returns to flowers*] Will you help me pack the wedding bell, Dave? I want to get it out of the way.

[*Attempts to pack it in box.*]

DAVE. Let me do that. Your hands are trembling.

MARGARET. So they are. I will leave it to you. I am a little nervous.

[MARGARET *goes into front room.*]

DAVE. [*Sympathetically*] I don't blame you.

[*He looks at the wedding bell with a smiling affection.*] *Enter* LENA.

DAVE. Hello, Lena!

LENA. Hello! You look as if it were your own.

DAVE. [*Smiling to himself*] It is. [*Starts*] I mean *almost.* I — we are going to have one of our own.

LENA. You and Polly?

DAVE [*nods.*]

LENA. That's no news. But you needn't feel so smart. You are not the *only ones.*

DAVE. Are you going to get married, Lena? [*Looks at her*].

LENA. I may.

DAVE. You don't say!

LENA. I don't know why that should astonish you so much — you think no one wants me because I am all worked out, you fancy Polly is the only kind of girl a man wants to marry because she is young and pretty. There *are* others!

DAVE. [*Staring in wonder at her outburst*] I never said nothing. What are you mad at me for?

LENA. Do you suppose I don't know what you are thinking? I tried to do as Miss Margaret's doing, and now look at me,— all my looks gone, and I wasn't so bad looking once. I had so much color that every one used to turn and look at me. You won't believe it, but I had redder cheeks than Polly. I was the envy of all the girls.

DAVE. You are not bad looking now, Lena.

LENA. A mirror doesn't lie, does it? Well, I have made up my mind now what I shall do.

DAVE. What will Miss Margaret say?

LENA. I don't care what she says.

DAVE. So you are really going to try it, Lena?

Re-enter MARGARET. *Exit* DAVE *to conservatory.*

MARGARET. Try what, Lena? Good evening.

LENA. [*Embarrassed*] I — I may get married.

MARGARET. Why, Lena, I didn't know you cared for any one.

LENA. I don't, specially.

MARGARET. Then, why?

LENA. [*Impatiently*] I know what you will say,— but a woman like me has got to think of herself. I am getting old. I don't like to look ahead and see myself an old woman with nobody to care whether I live or die. It is this way, Miss Margaret, if I am ever to have a home I must plan for it now. This is a good chance. I may never have another,— and I,— I want a change — I have had nothing for years but work— week in and week out.

MARGARET. And now you want some man to do this for you?

LENA. Why shouldn't he? It is a man's place. Why shouldn't it be — if he wants to?

MARGARET. [*Very gently placing her hand on* LENA'S] Who is the man, dear?

LENA. [*Softening*] He is a good man. Edward Knox. He hasn't a single bad habit.

MARGARET. I know, the carpenter.

LENA. He has asked me several times, but I thought about you and what you have been teaching us, so I always refused him. What you do is all right for you, Miss Margaret, you are different from the rest of us, but I — well, you see [*wipes a tear from her eye*], it seems like such a good chance. He has a steady job. He says he will be good to me.

MARGARET. Lena, Lena — and you don't love him!

LENA. No, but it is a perfectly respectable offer, Miss Margaret. I'm afraid I am one of the weak ones you talk about. I want a home — [*drops her head on the table with a little sob*] and I am so tired, Miss Margaret — so tired.

MARGARET. [*Very gently*] Other people get tired, too, Lena. Even married women get tired, fearfully tired. Have you thought what a home would be without love, Lena?

LENA. I don't ask for that — a rest, a change, is all I want. [*Desperately*] If I can only forget the thump, thump of the typewriter.

MARGARET. Hasn't it been a rest to be here with me this year?

LENA. Yes, but I need more than that. The typewriter is on my brain, on my nerves. It seems to me I'll do anything to quit work and have a husband — some one who will look out for me.

MARGARET. [*Gently*] Poor girl! But, Lena, let me ask you one thing. If you feel that way, how can you be so unkind to Mary? Why can you not understand a little of what she has been through?

LENA. [*Astonished*] Mary!

MARGARET. Yes. Why is it you feel yourself so much better than Mary? She is sweet and

gentle — she has a heart of gold and you can see from her face that she has suffered — yet you have never spoken one kind word to her — usually you ignore her in the most pointed way. You have hurt her cruelly.

LENA. If you knew how I despise that kind of a girl! What else can she expect?

MARGARET. You said just now that you were *tired.* Remember that Mary was more than tired — she was hungry — think of it — *starving* when *she* did — what you are going to do.

LENA. Miss Margaret, you surely do not compare *me* with a girl who has been as low as Mary!

MARGARET. [*Rising and speaking in tones of gentle pleading*] Marry Edward Knox, Lena. Be as happy as you can. I do not stand in your way. All I ask is a little charity for Mary. I want you to see that you are about to do what she did. You are horror stricken at the idea, but it is true, nevertheless. You will give yourself for the necessities of life with no love in your heart,— only you have the advantage of Mary. You make a better bargain — a bargain for life. But she had one advantage over you — she was free ——

LENA. [*Starting to go, and very much hurt*] Then I'll be like Mary, only I'll be respectable!

MARGARET. [*Putting her arms about her*] Don't go like that, Lena. I don't blame you. I understand. My heart aches for you, for Mary, for all women.

LENA. [*Breaking down*] I think the world is pretty hard on us women, whichever way we turn. Someway, it is easier for a man to face it than a woman — [*Starts to go, hesitates, then comes back, and speaks in a low voice*] There is another reason, Miss Margaret — I don't want you to think me all bad — but I want — [*hesitates and looks at* MARGARET] it isn't only a home and a husband, but I want something to love. I want a little child of my own — all my own.

[*A real beauty comes into the girl's face.*]

MARGARET. [*Kissing her — astonished — touched — a light of comprehension breaking over her face*] Lena!

LENA. [*Softening completely*] You see, children have always run from me, Miss Margaret. They never would come, no matter how I coaxed and tried to win them. It always hurt me. I suppose it is because I am so thin and peaked looking. Children love a girl like Polly. I thought if I had one of my own — it would *have* to come to me — [*passionately*] I would work and slave for it — oh, I should *make* it love me. A baby never sees the lines and wrinkles in its mother's face.

MARGARET. [*Taking her hands*] Thank you for telling me this. I will come to your wedding, Lena.

LENA. [*Joyfully*] Oh, will you! I did not dare to ask.

MARGARET. [*Deeply touched*] Yes. I will come, now.

LENA. [*Going, speaks earnestly*] Thank you. [*Wistfully*] I wish I were strong, like you.

MARGARET. [*Sighing*] I am not so strong, Lena. Good–bye. I am so glad you came in, dear.

[*Exit* LENA.]

MARGARET. [*Walks slowly and in deep thought to the center of the stage, then stops and says softly*] All of us — in the grip of the mighty forces of nature. [*She looks at the time and moves about restlessly*] Almost eight—[*The hands of the clock are seen to creep slowly and steadily to eight and past it*] If he shouldn't come! if he shouldn't [*She hears some one and starts eagerly, but stops in disappointment as she sees who it is*] Oh!

Enter POLLY *at the side door in party dress, looking very roguish and pretty.*

POLLY. [*Gaily*] Hello! Is anybody here?

MARGARET. You mean Dave? Yes, he is in there. [*Nodding in the direction of the conservatory door.*]

POLLY. [*Shyly, coquettishly*] Has he told you — did he say anything?

MARGARET. No, but I can readily guess.

Enter DAVE.

DAVE. It is all ready, Miss Margaret. Hello, Polly! How long have you been here? [*Softly*] Did you tell her?

POLLY. No, she guessed it.

[*As if she were disappointed at losing the opportunity of telling her.*]

DAVE. She did!

MARGARET. [*Smiling at them*] That wasn't hard.

DAVE. Well, *will* you make the wedding bell for Polly and me?

POLLY. [*Nodding energetically*] One like Miss Cornelia's — as big as hers. You really won't dislike wedding bells as much as you pretend, Miss Margaret — not when you see how happy we are! [*Squeezes* DAVE'S *arm*] It is to be a real *old-fashioned* marriage, Miss Margaret. [*A little defiantly*] I am going to give all my time to keeping house for Dave [DAVE *smiles in perfect content*] and not work for my living any more.

DAVE. [*Bravely*] What's mine's hers, I say. I'd be a low sort to let a girl like Polly go on working. She'll never want, not while I've got a pair of hands.

POLLY. I won't mind asking Dave for money. Oh, we are dreadfully happy, Miss Margaret. Come along, Dave, or we'll be late for the dance. I hear them tuning up now. [*Dances about*] Miss Margaret, you'd better come too. Join in the dance.

MARGARET. [*Shaking her head*] My feet are grown heavy.

POLLY. You aren't working to-night, are you? [*Impulsively*] We might help you.

MARGARET. No, I am expecting some one.

POLLY. Oh? Perhaps you are going to be happy too. There, *I thought* you were a woman like the rest of us. Some of the girls said you hadn't a heart, but I knew better. Oh, it is so good to be in love, Miss Margaret — [*she gives* MARGARET *an impulsive hug*] and to find a man like Dave.

MARGARET. [*Petting her and pinning some roses on her*] You shall have your wedding bell! We all need joy.

Some one is heard at the front door. MARGARET *starts again in anxious concern.*

DAVE. [*Smiling at her*] It isn't *your* man. It's only Mary. Good night. [*Enter Mary.*]

[*Exuent* DAVE *and* POLLY *arm in arm.*]

MARGARET. [*Watching them*] Happy, happy children. What is it, Mary? Why aren't you at the dance?

MARY. There is no place for *me* there. I had no one to go with — oh, I don't mind. I saw a light here. I thought maybe I could do something for you. I fancied you were lonely.

MARGARET. [*After a restless look at the door, sits at table, abstractedly fingering the lilies*] Yes, I am afraid I am. [*Looks at time*] Eight o'clock! [*Looks around blankly*] He's not coming.

MARY. [*Impulsively kneeling by her*] Oh, Miss Margaret, don't be so lonely, always. He is a beautiful gentleman. You must not make a mistake now. Don't send him away.

MARGARET *rises nervously and moves away.*

MARY. Forgive me, but I want to see you happy. Life is so hard alone — especially for a woman.

MARGARET. He was to be here by eight if — if —[*Sits on stone bench*] Oh, Mary, I fear I was not noble or great. There are words a man said that ring in my ears — "Terms — a bargain." I made terms — conditions. Perhaps I might have found a better way.

MARY. The flower shop — was that it?

MARGARET. [*With hopeless despair*] He said he would not come back unless he saw his way clear. It is after eight and he hasn't come. He has given up. I may not see him again — oh, what shall I do?

[*She lays her head on the arm of the great stone bench with a little sob.*]

MARY. [*Standing behind the bench and bending over her*] Don't cry, Miss Margaret. It can't be too late. There is no eastern train out for an hour at least. Can you not send for him?

MARGARET. [*Rising restlessly*] Yes — but ——

MARY. Why not? I will take the word to him. Let me. Why not?

MARGARET. [*Pacing the room*] My pride. How can I do what I have been telling all these women not to do? Think of all that I have taught them, all that they look to me for, and how happy they are — and then for me to fail them — oh, how can I? [*Sits down.*]

MARY. [*Kneeling by her*] Every one of them would understand. It is sweet to surrender.

MARGARET. They have at least had love in their lives — and I — I have had to do without —[*Leaning back in the stone bench, she closes her eyes,—dance music is heard — the seductive strains of a Strauss waltz*] You may be right. All is different in the quiet of evening, one sees with other eyes. Look at Polly and Dave — no troublesome ideals — no philosophy — only joy, abandon, romance. I confess it, [*sighs heavily*] I envy them to-night. [*The music is heard more clearly, and she half listens*] I feel weak, Mary.

Something in me is giving way. I may send for him. It is these flowers — these lilies. Take them away. [*Passionately*] Oh, take them away. The odor steals over my senses, berefts me of reason, benumbs my judgment. [MARY *starts to remove them*] No, no. Leave them. I love them. I love them. [*Gathers them to her, buries her face in them and then lets them fall to the table. She listens, unconsciously pulsing with the music — then rousing herself*] It is that dance music! It is creeping into my blood, sapping my will. I shall send for him. I shall, I shall — oh, I am losing my senses. I can't think and I must think! Shut the door, Mary! Shut out that music — [MARY *closes door, but music is still heard, though it is not so penetrating*] Oh, it is no use. I can hear it still. It has utterly undone me. Is this what it is to be merely a woman — no will — no head — all heart — nothing but heart, with a cry in it that will not be stilled. *I want him — I want him.* Is this the mighty love cry of the ages that has kept us in the dark and made the dungeon sweet so long? Ah, my sisters, I have understood your needs — now I know your temptation. The one face. I must see it again — the one voice —[*Passionately*] Oh, Mary, can't you shut out that music?

MARY. Miss Margaret — *one* woman can do

so little — must we not wait for *all society* to change — for *men* to be free themselves? I used to hear them talking in the mill — some day the struggle will not be so fierce, they said — everything will be better — for women, too. Why should you sacrifice yourself now? It is foolish, when you could be happy. He looks so good and kind ——

MARGARET. [*As the music without rises in a poignant crescendo of joy and abandon*] If God would still *my heart* — I could go on teaching — but now, to be alive like this and give it up — he was right, that man — what was it he said — in the grip — mighty forces. [*Puts her hands to her face*] No, I cannot give him up! I cannot. It is too much to ask. I will send for him. Quick, Mary, a pen. [MARY *brings writing material.*] No conditions. That is the way to love — [*Writes*] "Come back. Have it your way. Only come"— there! Some one is knocking. Perhaps it is he!

[*She rises eagerly, still holding the letter in her hand.*]

MARY *opens the door. Enter* LOUISE RAMSEY. MARY *discreetly withdraws.*

LOUISE. Oh, Margaret!

MARGARET. [*Seeing* LOUISE'S *abandon to distress*] What is it?

LOUISE. It is all over. [*Drops in a chair.*]

MARGARET. [*Shocked and looking at her*] You don't mean—

LOUISE. William! He won't allow it. I can't sing to-morrow — nor ever again.

MARGARET. It is as I said.

LOUISE. Yes. My voice had better have remained silent. It is torture to know that I have it and cannot use it. Oh, Margaret, how right you were. It was awful — the scene I had with him; and his face, it was perfectly frozen.

MARGARET. You were warned of that. I prepared you.

LOUISE. But I never dreamed he could be so cruel. The mailed hand, you said. I felt it — oh, I felt it — and for the first time since our marriage. I am heartbroken.

MARGARET. I knew you had no idea of the ordeal ahead of you. That was why I suggested my keeping the contract. You can't break it.

LOUISE. We must destroy it. He has notified Ten Eyck.

MARGARET. But you, Louise? You went out of here a radiant woman, bent on triumph — your life's opportunity in your grasp. Where is your pride — your spirit?

LOUISE. [*Bowing low*] Crushed — in the dust.

MARGARET. And your voice — is it to be

stilled forever — by that man! [*Vehemently*] You can't give up like this.

LOUISE. [*Groaning*] My voice! Oh — don't speak of it!

MARGARET. You haven't much *fight*, Louise.

LOUISE. [*Cries*] Nor would *you* have if you loved him.

MARGARET *starts at the truth of this, looks at her letter and turns away.*

LOUISE. I don't know why William can't see and understand and really sympathize with me a little — but if he can't — what am I to do? I am helpless — I love him, Margaret. You can't fight the man you love, even if he is cruel or if he fails to see; you know that, don't you? You have no weapons, you are powerless. Don't you understand, Margaret? Or have you never cared for any one?

MARGARET. [*Breathes hard and looks at her letter*] What did he say to you?

LOUISE. [*Hurt, reserved*] I don't care to repeat all he said. I don't know that it was in the words only — although they were short and stern enough. He simply said he forbade it, it reflected on his honor ——

MARGARET. Honor!

LOUISE. I know there's no reason in it, but that wasn't the thing that influenced me. It

was the coldness,— the withdrawal of his love — the silence — why he wouldn't speak to me for more than an hour! Oh, I couldn't face that month after month. Better the silence of my voice than that silence. I'm as limp as a rag now. A year of it would kill me. I know it's all wrong — but what can I do — a woman's heart is something, Margaret.

MARGARET. [*As if answering herself*] Yes, *your woman's heart!*

LOUISE. After all, Margaret — is it worth it? to persist in singing, and as a consequence lose my husband's love? He made it clear that that would be the price. To forfeit all the tenderness, the sweetness, the protection — and he gives me that most generously — I never fully appreciated it until it was withdrawn this afternoon — for the sake of glory and fame — is it worth it, Margaret,— when you come right down to it? The clasp of a strong man's arms, when he loves you — isn't it the most precious thing in a woman's life, Margaret — better than art and all the plaudits of the world? Tell me, Margaret.

MARGARET. Don't ask me.

[*She turns her back and reaches for* LOUISE'S *hand.*]

LOUISE. It is sweet to belong to some one. If you loved, Margaret, you would know.

[MARGARET *tortured, moves to the window.*]

LOUISE. You seem agitated.

MARGARET. I am, fearfully. [*Up stage she turns about*] Well! [*Quietly and slowly tears up her letter to* HARTWELL] We are a weak lot — we women — when we love ——

LOUISE. What is that?

MARGARET. [*Tossing the pieces from her*] My happiness. There it goes ——

LOUISE. [*Beginning to forget her own grief at sight of* MARGARET'S] Why, Margaret!

MARGARET. Your lack of strength teaches me my own. Some one must renounce the sweetness. The new truth must force its way to the light — what if a few of us die in the travail! Come, I say to my sisters, let us go forward — but one and all they cry out and fall to the ground, their hands clutching their hearts. Some one must stand up and be strong. So I will try to be [*her voice breaks and she sinks on the bench, her head on its arm*] the strong one. Oh, there is that music again! Mary, can't you shut it out?

LOUISE. [*Kneels by her*] Tell me about it, Margaret,— what is your trouble? I cannot have caused it all.

MARGARET. I wanted women to be free.

LOUISE. Perhaps we don't want to be free, Margaret.

MARGARET. It looks that way.

LOUISE. But if men love us as we are — and you know we have many faults, why not try to be grateful and contented and forget our — our *voices?* Perhaps we are too selfish. Isn't love the main thing?

MARGARET. [*Goes on, not heeding what* LOUISE *has said*] Now, God must still my heart. Then I can go on.

LOUISE. [*A light dawning*] Margaret, what has happened? To whom was that letter addressed,— the one you tore up? Was it to — Stephen Hartwell?

MARGARET. [*Wearily*] What does it matter now?

LOUISE. It reminds me. I heard William talking with him this afternoon.

MARGARET. [*Suddenly eager*] Yes? What did he say? Tell me — every word.

LOUISE. I didn't hear it all. He thought I had gone — he told me to come to you at once — but I was so upset and my eyes were so red I didn't dare appear on the street. I was in my room.

MARGARET. Tell me what he said — at once. I must know.

LOUISE. I caught only a few words — a judge with a wife in business — public laughter — career ruined — eccentric ideas — scandal ——

MARGARET. [*Smothers a cry*] Oh!

LOUISE. Tell me — did he mean you, Margaret?

MARGARET. Yes, yes — tell me what else ——

LOUISE. If it had occurred to me that he was talking of you, Margaret, I would have listened with all my ears, but I knew William was furious with me, and I thought he was just finishing up on poor Stephen Hartwell. If I hadn't been so absorbed in my own troubles!

MARGARET. But you must have heard something else — try and remember.

LOUISE. "A man may be selfish — but not a woman"— I heard William say that; and "If we men give in once, the bars will be down — there'll be no stopping the women. They will be like a lot of hens let into a garden — run and scratch everywhere — spoil everything. Now is the time to take a firm stand."

MARGARET. But Stephen Hartwell — what did *he* say?

LOUISE. His voice was so low — I heard only one thing.

MARGARET. What was that?

LOUISE. "She will send for me"——

MARGARET. [*Grasps* LOUISE *by the arm*] You are sure — he said that?

LOUISE. Yes.

MARGARET *groans and sinks back on the bench.*

LOUISE. And William said — "No, she won't — such women can't love — that's the sign of it; they never surrender — they are too selfish."

MARGARET. [*Murmurs*] Worse and worse.

LOUISE. You see that's William's idea, Margaret. Tell me, what can I do? You love Stephen Hartwell?

MARGARET. [*With anguished feeling*] Oh, yes, yes! Can't you see it?

LOUISE. Well! what right had William to talk to Stephen Hartwell like that! Hasn't he made me miserable enough?

MARGARET. He was angry with me.

LOUISE. Why?

MARGARET. Because I wanted you to sing.

LOUISE. I'll go to Hartwell myself.

MARGARET. No, no. You can do nothing. [*She goes mechanically to the window. Her voice is plaintive, far away*] It is all perfectly hopeless now — don't you see — perfectly hopeless.

There is a noise of some one entering. Both start.

MARGARET. *There — who is that?*

Enter TEN EYCK *in great concern.*

TEN EYCK. [*Vehemently*] Ah! Here you are, you bad girl! How dare you! How dare you treat me like this ——

LOUISE. Don't say a word! Don't make me feel worse than I do.

TEN EYCK. I shall not let you off. I shall not, I tell you ——

LOUISE. I can't do anything else.

TEN EYCK. Yes, yes, you can! Oh, these husbands! They will drive me crazy, *crazee!* Why did you ever marry? Don't you be such a fool, Margaret. You will be right under his thumb — you are perfectly right, Margaret. Stick to your flower shop. Now, if Louise here were only like you! Such a voice! Heavens! I tell you I will hold you to your contract! Where is it, Margaret?

MARGARET *takes it from table drawer, and gives it to him and then quietly disappears through conservatory door.*

TEN EYCK. There, husband or no husband, you shall sing — do you hear? I saw through his excuses — he's like a sulky boy for all the world.

LOUISE. You can't *live* with sulks! I beg you to drop the subject. I can do nothing, I tell you. Can't you understand my position?

TEN EYCK. I understand well enough. You are like all the *wives* — as like as peas in a pod — perfectly satisfied to give up an art that might make you famous and bring in thousands of

dollars — what for? To tickle his sense of authority, his vanity, his pride.

LOUISE. You don't understand. I love my husband. [*Angry at him*] I must do as he wishes. I cannot forfeit his love.

TEN EYCK. You wouldn't if it was worth anything. Oh, they are all alike, too! This isn't my first experience, unfortunately. But, great Scott, what am I to do for to-morrow?

MARGARET. [*Enters hastily*] There, I hear a carriage. [*Goes to doors at the back and opening them, calls*] Some one is at the front door, Mary. Open it, quick!

Enter RAMSEY.

RAMSEY. [*Powerfully, quickly*] Ah, Louise, I have come for you. It is almost train time — [*He and* MARGARET *face each other almost fiercely for a moment*] Well? Good evening, Mr. Ten Eyck. [*They are all very still. He looks about him sharply*] What's going on here?

TEN EYCK. Train time! You don't mean——

RAMSEY. I don't think we need repeat my message of this afternoon, Mr. Ten Eyck. My decision was final.

TEN EYCK. But your wife — the contract — *she* has something to say ——

RAMSEY. [*Amicably*] Has she? Now? I think not — we have already agreed on the matter.

TEN EYCK. [*In conciliatory terms, resorting to flattery*] Don't decide too hastily, Mr. Ramsey. Of course you know there are others I might get to sing — plenty of others — who would jump at the chance — but your wife is the star of them all — her voice — really, sir — her voice is singularly beautiful — so fresh — so pure — so like the lark — yes, I mean it, sir — it is a fortune ——

RAMSEY. I know — no one appreciates it more than I. She shall have plenty of opportunities to be heard, but not professionally.

TEN EYCK. [*Turning desperately to* MARGARET, *who is sitting listlessly at the back of the room*] Margaret, can't you help us? Use your influence with Mr. Ramsey — talk to him.

MARGARET. It's no use, Ten Eyck. I have given Mr. Ramsey up. Nothing can change him, no possible argument — unless it were the argument of poverty — always a telling argument even with the William Ramseys of the world ——

RAMSEY. Margaret! Allow my wife to support me? Don't be absurd.

MARGARET. [*Calmly continuing as if he had not spoken*] Or if he were a real democrat ——

RAMSEY. What do you mean?

MARGARET. [*Contemplatively*] Or perhaps a terrible shock of some kind — a life and death shock — that might do it. No. [*Rising and*

coming forward] I think it rests with Louise. It is for her to take her life in her own hands — if she can.

RAMSEY. [*Aside to* MARGARET] Remember, I hold the same power over your happiness that you hold over mine.

MARGARET. [*Turning to* LOUISE] I have urged her to sing—I urge her again. [*She is calm, impersonal*] Do it, Louise — [*turns away*] I can say no more.

RAMSEY. [*Grimly, following her with his eyes*] Thank you.

TEN EYCK. Won't you at least leave her free to choose, Mr. Ramsey?

RAMSEY. (*Pleasantly but coldly, simulating unconcern*] She is at liberty always to do as she chooses — I, of course, will not stand in her way. Make your choice, Louise. Let it be final. Do not consider me in the least. Will you sing for this man?

LOUISE. [*Helpless, desperate, glances at each one, coming back to* RAMSEY'S *face, whose expression she knows so well. She reads it with a long, keen look and then wilts on his breast*] I can't, Ten Eyck — I simply can't.

RAMSEY. That ends it, I think. [*Takes the contract from* TEN EYCK *and tears it.*]

TEN EYCK *starts to speak, and then with a*

gesture of disgust and helpless rage, goes from the room.

RAMSEY. We must go now, dear.

LOUISE. [*Embraces* MARGARET, *tearfully*] Good-bye, Margaret ——

RAMSEY. [*Going to the door with* LOUISE, *his arm about her*] There, sweetheart, it was a bit of folly, but I forgive you. I know it is hard, but you will be much happier this way. Trust me. I know best. You shall have love in full measure. [*Pauses at the door and looks back at* MARGARET, *who is gazing at him with steady, far-off eyes which seem to look through him and beyond him*] Will you step into the carriage, Louise, and wait for me? I will join you in a moment. I must speak to Margaret.

[*Exit* LOUISE.]

RAMSEY *comes forward and looks at* MARGARET. *She is very still, wrapped in statuesque, impenetrable calm.*

RAMSEY. You think I am cruel. [MARGARET *is silent*] She will be all right when I get her home—away from you and your flower shop ideas. They are very disturbing. Of course she's upset now, but she will be quite happy again.

MARGARET *turns away.*

RAMSEY. Margaret, I don't like to go away without knowing how you are coming out.

MARGARET. There is nothing — now.

RAMSEY. I will make my part of it square, now that Louise is settled. Honestly, I will see Hartwell. Take back everything. I promise you that — [MARGARET *glances up as if to say "That isn't all," but she remains silent*] Margaret, haven't you sent for him?

MARGARET. No.

RAMSEY. Aren't you going to?

MARGARET. [*In a stifled voice*] I can't now.

RAMSEY. [*Looks at watch*] Jove, nearly train time. Hartwell's train, too. [MARGARET *droops*] He won't come if you don't send for him.

MARGARET. [*Dreamily, steadily, wistfully, looking straight out*] If he loves me — he will come ——

RAMSEY. You poor girl! You can't give in any more than I can. [*Moves as if to go and then turns*] I say, Margaret, it was a lucky thing you and I didn't marry, wasn't it,—although I must admit you hold me still, somehow. But you did make me everlastingly furious to-day!

MARGARET. You have made me utterly miserable — good night.

[*She vanishes through the conservatory door, which closes behind her.*]

RAMSEY. Well! [*Turns to go.*]

Enter STEPHEN HARTWELL. *He speaks in the same deep, calm, and measured tones.*

HARTWELL. Just a moment, Mr. Ramsey. I am here, you see, after all, although she did not send for me. I have made my decision — I shall marry her — in spite of everything.

RAMSEY. With the flower shop?

HARTWELL. Yes. I have come to the conclusion — (and I have done some thinking to-day, Ramsey — laid a lifetime of prejudices) — I have come to the conclusion that I have no right to take it away — it is her work — her life — it is vital to her happiness.

RAMSEY. Well, I am glad you came in before I left — I wanted to see you to-night.

HARTWELL. It is easy to be romantic, Ramsey — set a woman on a pedestal as a saint for devotion and all that,— it is harder to help her live her own life, but perhaps after all that is the more genuine devotion — real chivalry in the end. It is what Margaret Kendall asks — I am going to give it to her — if I can.

RAMSEY. Mr. Hartwell, I wish to explain ——

HARTWELL. [*Continuing*] So let your newspapers say what they like, your politicians do what they will, together Margaret and I can face whatever you care to do, whatever threats you may carry out — we shall have the real thing.

RAMSEY. I take them all back, Hartwell!— all the threats — everything — I will stand by you

— things shall go on exactly as we have planned. I'll ignore the woman question, if it comes up, I'll manage somehow. I want to see you both happy — truly. I was angry this afternoon — I am all right now ——

HARTWELL. [*With a sharp look at him*] Then your wife isn't going on the stage?

RAMSEY. No.

HARTWELL. Ah, that accounts for it ——

RAMSEY. [*With a confessing smile*] Well, yes,— but you can afford to forgive me with so much happiness before you — I cared for her once myself, you know — she is ——

HARTWELL. I know — you needn't tell me— but why isn't she here?

RAMSEY. [*Going into the conservatory*] Let me call her.

HARTWELL *observes the flower shop with a new and admiring interest. He seems well content. Enter* LOUISE.

LOUISE. Where is my husband?

HARTWELL. In there.

LOUISE. Are you going on the same train with us?

HARTWELL. [*Smiling*] No, I think not.

LOUISE. [*Rapidly whispering*] Is it going to be all right?

HARTWELL. Yes — I hope so.

LOUISE. [*Same hurried tones*] I am so glad. [*seizes his hand*] she is the loveliest, noblest,— They are coming — oh! [*Hastily gathers up pieces of* MARGARET'S *torn letter*] She wrote it to you.

Enter RAMSEY *and* MARGARET.

LOUISE. [*Proudly, airily*] William, have you forgotten me?

RAMSEY. [*Starting forward*] Oh, my dear! I beg your pardon. I was just coming ——

LOUISE. You stayed so long I thought perhaps you were being *converted.*

RAMSEY. Mercy no!

LOUISE. [*Lightly, pointedly*] Well, you seem to find it very *fascinating* here, nevertheless! [*Over her shoulder*] Good night, Mr. Hartwell. Good night, Margaret. I shall not let him bother you again. [*They go out.*]

HARTWELL. [*Who has been putting the pieces of* MARGARET'S *torn letter together, looks up, holds out his arms, into which* MARGARET *swiftly glides*] At last!

MARGARET. You have found a way?

HARTWELL. Yes, love. It is you — you! I was blind not to see it at once — to keep you waiting all this time — you poor darling! [*Holding forth the letter*] If you only knew how happy that makes me!

MARGARET. Why?

HARTWELL. [*Holding her close*] It tells me you are human — a woman — *mine.*

MARGARET. [*Happy mischief in her voice and eyes*] But it is torn!

HARTWELL. Yes.

MARGARET. [*Softly, seriously*] Do you know why?

HARTWELL. [*Holding her away from him and looking at her thoughtfully*] I think it must be — those *other women*, about whom you care so much.

MARGARET. Yes.

HARTWELL. It is in your face — it is the secret of your beauty — I see it now, and I love you for it. [*Lifting her hand to his lips.*]

MARGARET. [*Leading him to the stone bench*] Stephen, I want to tell you something. It came to me only a moment ago.

HARTWELL. Yes, dear?

MARGARET. I can give this up [*indicating the flower shop*] and do a less public work — quieter, more obscure — a work not so ostentatious ——

HARTWELL. Can you?

MARGARET. [*Still anxiously*] I would not embarrass you — jeopardize your career — not for anything in the world.

HARTWELL. You will not — don't let that

worry you. [*Draws her to him and leans back contentedly*] It is nice here, isn't it? The flowers belong to you, Margaret. You are one of them. [*Tenderly, playfully*] No, dear, no, I think we will keep the flower shop.

MARGARET. [*Slips on her knees before him with a little cry*] Oh, Stephen!

HARTWELL *encircling her with his arm, lifts her face to his and gazes long into it, then bows his head upon hers.*

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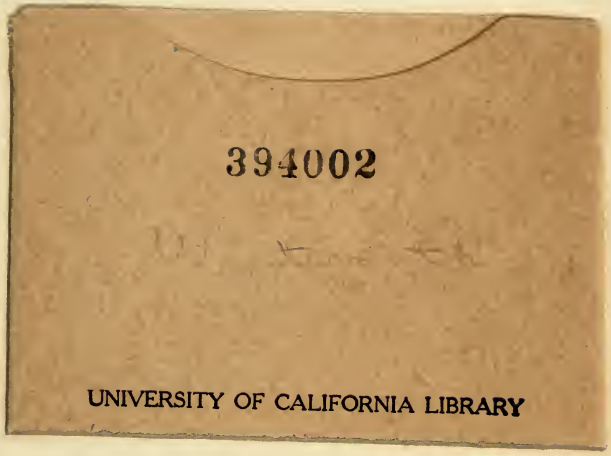
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